THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

SPRINGSTEEN

THE BOSS THE COMPLETE STORY

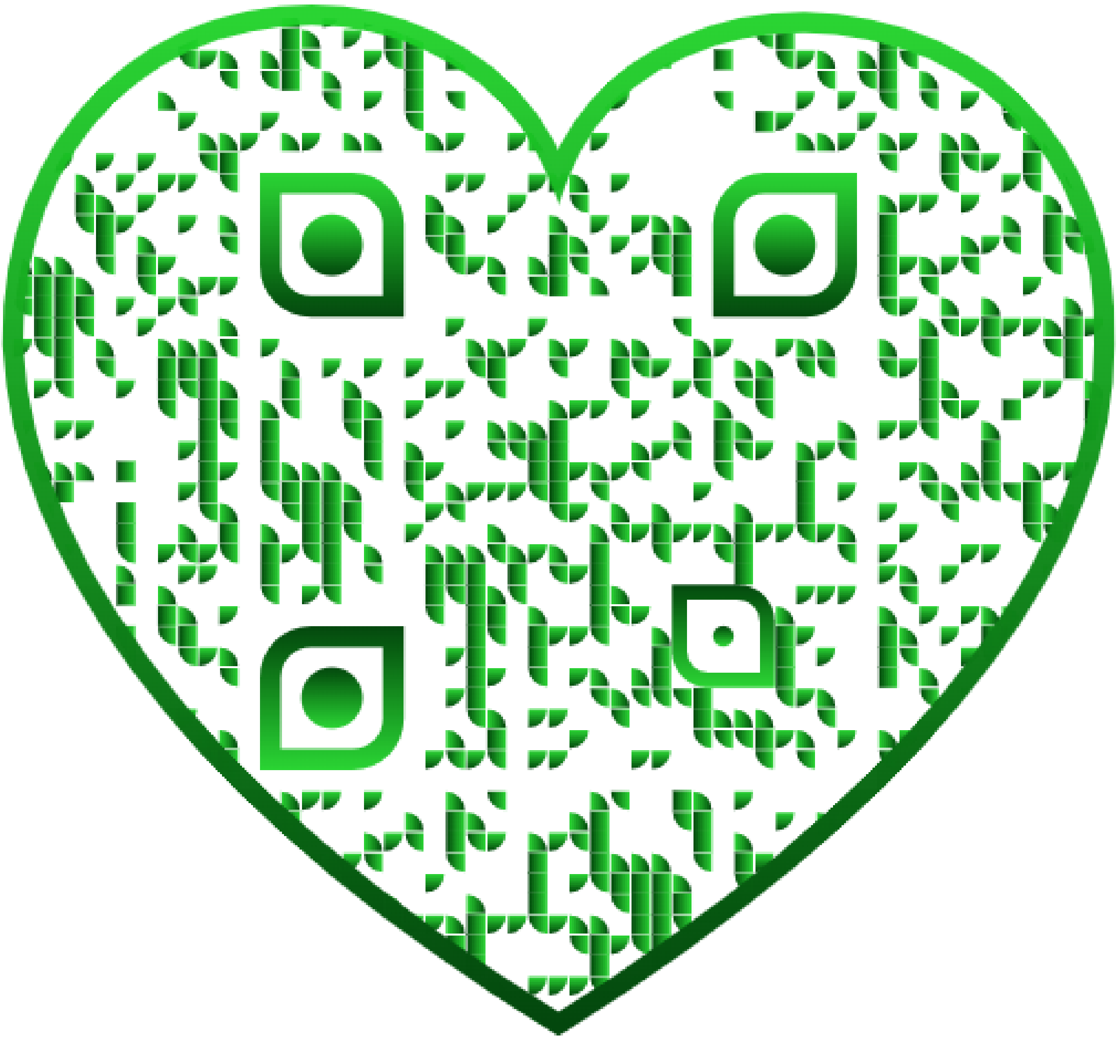
DELUXE REMASTERED EDITION

RARE PHOTOS

CLASSIC INTERVIEWS

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF EVERY ALBUM

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**



GREETINGS!

SEPTEMBER 1978. Bruce Springsteen has just finished playing a show at the Palladium in New York City; a show that has stretched on for nearly four astonishing hours, and which the reporter from *NME* has been moved to call "the greatest rock'n'roll show that I will ever experience". It is very late, and even the most demanding of fans would probably cut Springsteen some slack. As dawn approaches, though, he remains energised and attentive, convening with the hundreds of awe-struck followers waiting to pay homage and collect autographs.

"My music gave me everything… I was nobody, I had nothing," he explains to the writer. "I will never put anyone in the position of being humiliated." The fans, he says, give him "a real heavy feeling of responsibility... I don't wanna let the people that have supported me down. And it ain't good enough just getting by, I wanna take it all the way, every night."

Thirty-seven action-packed years down the line, Bruce Springsteen's modus operandi remains miraculously unchanged. As his career rolls into its fifth decade, Springsteen's commitment, conscientiousness and exuberant love for his fans, his country and the redemptive possibilities of rock'n'roll stand as an example to all other performers. "Bruce has never talked about stopping," his henchman Steve Van Zandt told *Uncut* a few years ago. "It's unimaginable."

Here, then, is a very special and, we hope, comprehensive guide to a true rock titan. In these pages, you'll find revelatory Springsteen interviews from every stage of his career. In 1974, laying waste to the dancehalls of Texas, his distrust of stardom is so great he hopes someone will shoot him if he ever plays Madison Square Garden. In 2002, he is at home in New Jersey, reiterating the core message that has sustained him for so long: "I think you have to make a point of behaving like a human being." In between, there are adventures in France, raids on Graceland, paranoid episodes involving socks, and much more.

There are also deep, forensic reviews of every Springsteen album, from *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* to *High Hopes*, shining new light on a musical catalogue that still, with each new chapter, has the capacity to startle and inspire.

You want the heart? You want the soul? You want control right now? Better listen to Bruce, baby…

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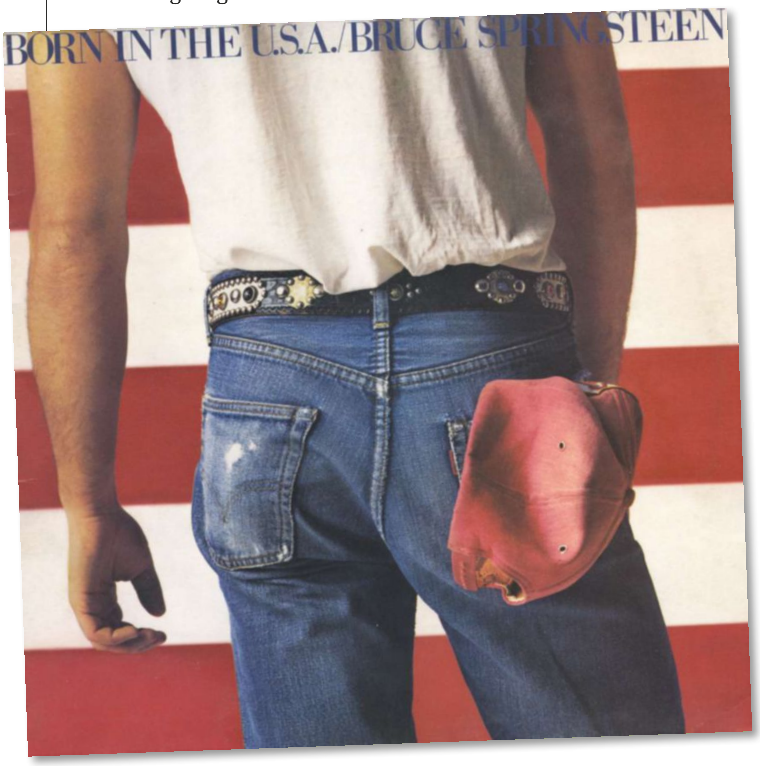
"Baby, I got my facts!" There are boxes like this one dotted through the mag, bringing you all kinds of trivia about Bruce Frederick Joseph Springsteen, from the reason he was expelled from Ocean County College, NJ, to his Forbes celebrity power ranking...



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Reborn in the UK: with the E Street Band, Glastonbury Festival, 2009

UNCUT

PUBLISHED BY Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 8th Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU and Time Inc. Books, 1271 Avenue of the Americas, 6th floor, New York, NY 10020 | **UNCUT EDITOR** John Mulvey, whose favourite Springsteen song is *New York City Serenade* **ART EDITOR** Marc Jones *Dancing In The Dark* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mick Meikleham *Atlantic City* **SENIOR DESIGNER** Michael Chapman, *4th July, Asbury Park (Sandy)* **EDITORIAL/PICTURE RESEARCH** Phil King *Blinded By The Light – Manfred Mann's Earth Band version* **CONTRIBUTORS:** Mark Bentley, *Kitty's Back* | Roy Carr, *Hungry Heart* | Allan Jones, *She's The One – the live version on Hammersmith Odeon London '75* | John Lewis, *Does This Bus Stop At 82nd Street* | Alastair McKay, *Atlantic City* | Gavin Martin, *Better Days* | Andrew Mueller, *Thunder Road* | Chris Roberts, *Candy's Room* | Neil Spencer, *Atlantic City* | Bud Scoppa, *Thunder Road* | Terry Staunton, *Atlantic City* | Adam Sweeting, *Thunder Road* | Luke Torn, *Badlands* | Peter Watts, *Jungleland* **COVER PHOTO:** WireImage **THANKS TO:** Benoît Rajalu, Stephanie Stevens-Wade, Matthew Webb, Emily Allen, Rebecca Green, Simon Bland, Johnny Lewis, Virginia Brown, Robert Sekula, Will Hughes, Andy Tidball, Anna Savva **MARKETING** Charlotte Treadaway **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Noemi Lopez | Sonja Zeven **PUBLISHING DIRECTOR** Ed Beale | **MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Williams | **COVERS PRINTED BY** Polestar Wheatons **TEXT PRINTED BY** Polestar Chantry | All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review. | **WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK**

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GREETINGS FROM ASBURY PARK, NJ

Greetings! A battle-hardened singer-songwriter emerges from the shoreline clubs, still getting to grips with his musical identity. BY CHRIS ROBERTS

★ 5 JANUARY 1973

"EVERYBODY HAS it, but most people just never figure it out," Bruce Springsteen once mused. "You've got to be able to see yourself for what you are. Not until then can you be what you want to be."

As the '60s became the '70s, Springsteen, 21, was playing clubs in Asbury Park, learning his trade and meeting the musicians who would eventually form the nucleus of The E Street Band. Springsteen's groups like Earth and Steel Mill (originally named Child) attracted crowds of 3,000 even without a record contract. But when a race riot in the summer of 1971 decimated Asbury Park's boardwalk area and disrupted his career progress, Springsteen, frustrated, thought he'd try things solo for a while. He took an exploratory trip to the West Coast: it achieved little.

He did, however, meet Mike Appel and Jim Cretecos, minor industry players whose greatest claim to fame at that time was writing "Don't You Want To Be Wanted?" for The Partridge Family. They agreed to manage Springsteen in March 1972. The contract, signed on the hood of a car, was eventually to prove a millstone to the singer. He, however, "had no money, nowhere to go, nothing to do. It was cold and I wrote a lot, like a madman."

In May, Appel set up a meeting at Columbia with executive John Hammond, the man who'd signed Bob Dylan a decade earlier. Despite Appel's breathtaking insolence ("You discovered Dylan, huh? Well, let's see if that was just luck or if you really have ears"), Hammond, and fellow bigwig Clive Davis, were impressed by an anxious Springsteen, who played at the piano five songs that would turn up on his debut. Soon, he was signed to Columbia for a $25,000 advance and $40,000 recording budget, most of which went to Appel's Laurel Canyon company.

There was uncertainty, though, about what the album was meant to be. Hammond liked Bruce solo and wanted a folk

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1. Blinded By The Light ★★★★
2. Growin' Up ★★★★★
3. Mary Queen Of Arkansas ★★★★
4. Does This Bus Stop At 82nd Street? ★★★★
5. Lost In The Flood ★★★★★
6. The Angel ★★★★
7. For You ★★★★
8. Spirit In The Night ★★★★
9. It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City ★★★★★

Released: January 5, 1973 (US); March 9, 1973 (UK)
Produced by: Mike Appel and Jim Cretecos
Recorded at: 914 Sound Studios, New York
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, acoustic and electric guitar, conga, harmonica, bass on "Blinded By The Light" and "Spirit In The Night"); Clarence Clemons (sax, backing vocals); Vincent Lopez (drums); Garry Tallent (bass); David Sancious (piano, organ); Harold Wheeler (piano on "Blinded By The Light"); Richard Davis (upright bass on "The Angel")
Highest chart position: UK 41; US 60
(These positions were attained only after the album was reissued in the 1980s)

CHUCK PULIN

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Can also be played on mono equipment See note over
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65480
Bruce Springsteen
GREETINGS
FROM
ASBURY
PARK
N.J.

Bruce Springsteen
GREETINGS FROM ASBURY PARK, N.J.
Side One:
Blinded By The Light
Growin' Up
Mary Queen Of Arkansas
Does This Bus Stop At 82nd Street ?
Lost In The Flood
Side Two:
The Angel
For You
Spirit In The Night
It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City

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1. BLINDED BY THE LIGHT (5.02)
2. GROWIN' UP (3.05)
3. MARY QUEEN OF ARKANSAS (5.20)
4. DOES THIS BUS STOP AT 82nd STREET (2.05)
5. LOST IN THE FLOOD (5.14)
(B. Springsteen)
1-5. Intersong Mus. Ltd.
MADE IN ENGLAND

...reading *Melody Maker*, mid 1973

singer's record. Springsteen had assumed he'd be encouraged to rock'n'roll with the guys – his favoured gang of friends and musicians from the old neighbourhood. Consequently, *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* evolved into a strange compromise between folk and rock, recorded in around two weeks and co-produced rather timidly by Appel and Cretecos, who were intent on conserving as much of the budget as possible.

Springsteen had written the majority of the songs in the shut-down beauty salon situated beneath his Asbury Park apartment. Grafting away on an ageing Aeolian spinet piano, a present from his aunt, amid out-of-commission hairdryers and sinks, he was prolifically creative. *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* remains the only album for which Springsteen wrote the lyrics first, then set them to music. To describe the flow of rhymes and references as "scattergun", though, is to understate their energy, presence and hit-and-miss hubris.

When the album was released in the first week of 1973, Springsteen began to draw "new Bob Dylan" comparisons from the press with a haste that might have been indecent were they not, up to a point, justifiable. He has since claimed that he wasn't a fully clued-up fan of Dylan, that he only really knew singles like "Just Like A Woman" and "Like A Rolling Stone", and that Chuck Berry was more of an influence. His storytelling technique on the album falls somewhere between the two. Like Berry, he sings about characters: the dreamers, chancers, lovers and losers he'd grown up with in unfashionable New Jersey. Like Dylan, he often does so using imagery that's at its best imaginative and inspired, at its worst opaque or impenetrable. Yet such is the range, passion and excitement of his verbosity across the nine songs that he makes a spectacular movie set of his hometown area, using the streets on which he was raised as a platform for poetry, a backdrop for bustling bohemian romanticism.

"Most of the songs were twisted autobiographies," he wrote later in *Bruce Springsteen: Songs*. This cascade of tumbling, dice-throwing lyrics came from "a moment where you're writing with no sure prospect of ever being heard. It's just you and your music. That only happens once. I never wrote in that style again. I steered away from it."

BOSSFACTS

★ **The upright bass on "The Angel" was played by Richard Davis, who also played bass on Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks***

★ **Springsteen and The E Street Band played the entire album live for the first time on November 22, 2009 at the HSBC Arena in Buffalo, New York, to mark the final show of the *Working On A Dream* Tour**

Somewhat wounded by the "Dylan rip-off" jibes, Springsteen would later learn to temper his tendency to use 25 words where five would do. Yet *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ*, for all its flaws – the paper-thin production, the vague, reticent soundbed, those relentless rivers of metaphors and similes – is even today a unique, exhilarating listen. It might not fully capture the man's raw talent, but it heatedly exhibits his desire, his zeal, his willingness to make something happen for himself. His desperation to say something, even if that means saying too much.

And then there's the fact that these are great songs. Unpolished, yes. Often half-lost in the ropey mix, sure. Yet "Blinded By The Light", "For You" and "Spirit In The Night" became durable Springsteen staples, while "Growin' Up" and "It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City" (both swiftly covered by the reliably savvy David Bowie, who saw Springsteen play Max's Kansas City in February '73) gave him a degree of crossover cool.

Hurriedly recorded in New York's petite 914 studio in July '72, the sessions were a spontaneous jumble of Bruce solo and Bruce with "the guys", who were called in to adorn the songs, but were trying, presumably with some discomfort and studio naivety, to not let loose too much. Springsteen "wrote impressionistically, changing names to protect the guilty, working to find something that was identifiably mine," and you can hear how thrilled he is to be doing this, how he hopes and believes, almost despite himself, that this means the world will hear his voice.

Spitting out his stories, testifying, perhaps too eager not to leave anything out.

Even so, when Springsteen thought the sessions were done, Clive Davis (who preferred the band songs to the solo songs) opined that there was no single. So Bruce went back in to add two more as afterthoughts, accompanying himself – as "the band" – on guitar, bass and drums. These afterthoughts were "Blinded By The Light" and "Spirit In The Night" – flop singles for Bruce, but US hits for Manfred Mann's Earth Band in 1977 (the former giving them a Billboard No 1).

It's difficult to discuss *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* without quoting excessively from its essence; those waterfalls of words. The now-iconic opening spillage of lines is as crucial to the album as "Someday a real rain will come and wash all this scum off the streets" is to Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*. With a mazy rush it begins, *"Madman drummers, bummers and Indians in the summer with a teenage diplomat/In the dumps with the mumps as the adolescent pumps his way into his hat..."* The rhyme fever gathers pace. It's unrestrained, unexpurgated. Sometimes clumsy or nonsensical. Sometimes giddy with elation. "A few of them I'd worked on for a week, but most of them were written in 15-minute blasts," Springsteen told *Rolling Stone*. "They were just jets, just energy. I'd had stuff stored up for years, because in the bars I'd been playing nobody listened to the words. So this first album was a big outlet."

The sound remains challenging. In the faster numbers the arrangements are often inspired by the Memphis soul and R'n'B stylings of, say, the Stax label as refracted through Van Morrison's readings of the same (especially the sax and keyboard flourishes), although the backbeats are steady, more rigid, more Motown. Springsteen doesn't yet have Spector's scale. There are brief flashes where everybody enjoys themselves in a lightly funky groove, on the rare occasions when Bruce's bejewelled shopping-list of imagery pauses.

But these are swiftly curtailed; they would be liberated on the rapid follow-up, *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle*. Perhaps it's for this reason that the two most unembellished, sparse numbers – "Mary Queen Of Arkansas" and "The Angel" – are among the most affecting. They're pretty much Springsteen solo, in a stripped-down manner he wouldn't attempt again until *Nebraska*. The former's references to circus figures and acrobats are quintessential early Bruce, while the angst about Mary climaxes in the piercing, *"I don't understand how you can hold me so tight and love me so damn loose."* The closing verse, in suggesting a fresh start or escape can come to pass if only the leading couple can get out of town, foreshadows the crux themes of *Born To Run*.

"The Angel" is more baroque, a classic fable of the bad-boy biker dead too soon including lines like *"the interstate's choked with nomadic hordes"*, which again feel like test runs for his third album. The boys and girls in his songs were to mature into adults as the albums progressed, but this is where their psyches, lusts and longings make their grand entrance.

"Growin' Up", delicious with descending chords, is a brilliant depiction of teenage vanity, nocturnal and narcissistic. *"I combed my hair till it was just right, and commanded the night brigade,"* sings Springsteen, and it's easy to see why the song appealed to Bowie. While "Does This Bus Stop At 82nd Street?" is an exhilarating gust of optimism, "Lost In The Flood" is an epic prototype for sections of "Jungleland", Springsteen's voice reaching unnatural heights through sheer force of will. It's one of his first car-culture fixated songs, of which crime writer George P Pelecanos has said, "None of us had ever heard songs on the radio that spoke to our world so completely and on such a visceral level as this. And he was just getting started."

"For You", meanwhile, is a florid love-hate song – *"Who am I to ask you to lick my sores?"* – with a brilliant chorus discernible beneath the snowstorm of syllables. "Spirit In The Night" is another prayer to escapism, with Greasy Lake its location for the classic rock'n'roll tropes of teenage Brando/Dean rebellion, fun and sex. The galloping finale of "It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City" is a sibling to "Growin' Up" – *"I burst just like a supernova"* is rhymed with *"dance just like a Casanova"* – in which the singer reaches the urgent pitch of a man rattling the bars of his cage, using words as his weapons. Asbury Park may not have been universally recognised as a picture-postcard paradise, but for Springsteen it was a goldmine.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ "For a debut this is staggeringly good; and whatever happens next in music, I have a strong suspicion that Bruce Springsteen will be a big part of it. He may even be it..." RICHARD WILLIAMS, MELODY MAKER, MARCH 31, 1973

Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ didn't make him a star. Over the course of 1973 it sold around 20,000 copies, and failed to make the Billboard Top 200. Critics were generally effusive, although the Dylan comparisons were rife, *Rolling Stone* describing it as "like 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' played at 78rpm, a typical track busting with more words than this review". (In 2003 the magazine was to rank it the 379th greatest album of all time.) Jackson Browne was supportive. In *Crawdaddy!*, Peter Knobler wrote, "Incredible songs... he sings with a freshness and urgency."

For his part, after nine years playing live, Springsteen was just glad to be making records. "When I first started," he told *Rolling Stone*'s Robert Hilburn years later, "I was pretty sure of myself. I had a tremendous amount of confidence for some reason. When I did my first record, I thought it was dynamite." You'll hear that confidence in every breathless, delirious outpouring of narrative the album struggles to contain. ✪

Springsteen's debut might not fully capture his raw talent, but it shows his desire, his zeal, his desperation to say something...

THE WILD, THE INNOCENT AND THE E STREET SHUFFLE

Nascent E Street Band in tow, Springsteen finds unlikely romance in his Jersey home — and starts to plot his escape. BY CHRIS ROBERTS

5 NOVEMBER 1973

A FEW MONTHS after the release of *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ*, Bruce Springsteen was already back in the studio. Recording sessions were slotted in between live dates, but *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle* was no rushed reiteration of its predecessor. That first record might have featured an Asbury Park postcard as a sleeve, but its hyperactive jumble of images and themes didn't consistently evoke a specific sense of place.

In contrast, *The Wild, The Innocent…*, saw Springsteen declaring and demonstrating his roots while eulogising the Everyman's urge to escape the familiar. He was honing his vocabulary. His musicians had gelled as a group on the road (though they weren't yet crystallised as The E Street Band in its best-known lineup). And his philosophy, his vision of what rock'n'roll can mean at its most transformative, had begun to bloom. "This guy may not be God yet, but he has his sleeveless undershirt in the ring," wrote influential critic Robert Christgau.

Musically, it's an album that celebrates a broad carnival of American styles. From the mock-worthy tones of the organ, to the funk-based wah-wah guitar on the opening track, from Phil Spector echoes to James Brown rhythms and joyous soul choruses, this – especially on Side Two – is where the prototype E Street Band stretches out and takes pride in the fact that it's an ensemble. Springsteen is still the storyteller aflame with missionary zeal, but now, with the band at his side, he knows when to recite and when to relax. Everyone breathes in a way they forgot to on *Greetings From Asbury Park ,NJ*, and the inrushes of oxygen just make the songs bigger and wider and deeper.

From rock to jazz via most points between, the arrangements were impressively conceived and astoundingly executed. With David Sancious often serving as a kind of unofficial musical director,

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1. The E Street Shuffle ★★★★
2. 4th Of July, Asbury Park (Sandy) ★★★★★
3. Kitty's Back ★★★★
4. Wild Billy's Circus Story ★★★
5. Incident On 57th Street ★★★★★
6. Rosalita (Come Out Tonight) ★★★★★
7. New York City Serenade ★★★★★

Released: November 5, 1973 (US); February 22, 1974 (UK)
Produced by: Mike Appel and Jim Cretecos
Recorded at: 914 Sound Studios, New York
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitars, harmonica, mandolin, recorder); Vini "Mad Dog" Lopez (drums, backing vocals, cornet on "The E Street Shuffle"); Garry Tallent (bass, tuba, backing vocals); Danny Federici (accordion, backing vocals, second piano on "Incident On 57th Street", organ on "Kitty's Back"); Clarence Clemons (sax, backing vocals); David L Sancious (pianos, organ, clarinet, sax on "The E Street Shuffle", backing vocals, string arr on "New York City Serenade")
Highest chart position: UK 33; US 59
(Attained only after reissue in the '80s)

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN: THE WILD, THE
INNOCENT & THE E STREET SHUFFLE

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(KC 32432)
Intersong Music Limited
1. THE E STREET SHUFFLE (4:26)
2. 4th OF JULY, ASBURY PARK (Sandy) (5:35)
3. KITTY'S BACK (7:07)
4. WILD BILLY'S CIRCUS STORY (4:43)
(B. Springsteen)
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Bruce and the E Street Band, during a three-night residency at Joe's Place, Cambridge, Mass, January 1974

JEFF ALBERTSON/CORBIS

Springsteen was finally able to realise his dreams, painting a vivid picture of Jersey and New York street life; the romanticised Belfast of Van Morrison's *Astral Weeks* was almost as much of an influence as *West Side Story*. He captured it so well here – the second half has a valedictory feel – that moving on from Asbury Park became the next inevitable move.

"This is the album where the lyrical explosion he exhibited on his debut crystallises into something unique and spectacular," Adam Duritz of Counting Crows told *Uncut* in 2003. "We are treated to a view of the dying carnival boardwalk world where nights are populated by the magic denizens of Springsteen's moonlit New Jersey. It's dying all throughout this album, and by the next album he'll be dreaming of escaping, but for the moment you can still see the magic as it must have been."

"I had to write about me, all the time, every song, because in a way I was trying to find out what that 'me' was," Springsteen told *Melody Maker* in late 1974 [*see pp14-21*]. "That's why I chose where I grew up, and where I lived... I take situations I'm in and people I know and I take them to the limits."

For all the good-time, Gary US Bonds-style soul revue energy of the upbeat tracks (*"Everybody form a line!"* hollers "The E Street Shuffle"), subtler shades and more reflective moods were making their presence felt. *"Save your notes,"* he cries on the magnificent finale "New York City Serenade", *"don't spend them on the blues, boy..."*

Springsteen, with a little help from his friends, had learned how to make individual notes count. As on *Greetings*..., his characters yearned to find a way to flee their environment, while ambivalently enamoured of it. This time, though, the camera focused in. Could they find love, glory or transcendence in their fading Jersey shore town, or even across the water in big bad Manhattan? The answers excavated by the songs were not glib: some might, some might not, they ventured. But stepping up and taking a risk was the only way to find out.

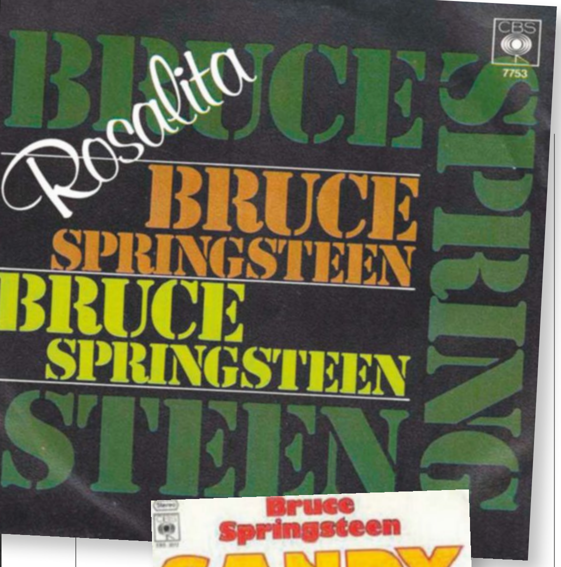
People and life jump from every groove of *The Wild, The Innocent*... as it straddles genres and dazzles with detail. The opening lines of first track "The E Street Shuffle" are as powerful a piece of Springsteen iconography as those on *Greetings*... It begins: *"Sparks fly on E Street when the boy prophets walk it handsome and hot/All the little girls' souls go weak..."* Instantly, we're lifted up and placed somewhere considerably more colourful than, say, whichever Chicago album was big at the time. (Bruce had just toured arenas with Chicago: he hated it, feeling uncomfortable as a support act). This is the album where the magic kicks in – though to risk killing the magic for a moment, E Street was actually where Sancious lived, and the "shuffle" came about when the band's van broke down. Carrying their equipment, they made a short walk, in heavy snow, to his house. Thus the phrase "the E Street Shuffle" became a band in-joke. The breakneck-paced song amplifies all concerned into spotlit lovers, fighters, cops, crooks, dancers.

More conventionally romantic is "4th Of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)", for many fans his best-written song prior to "Born To Run". It displays an extraordinary early grasp of how to balance expressions of yearning with artistic restraint. The chorus is a heart-tugger, while the anti-hero's confessions – *"And me, I just got tired of hangin' in them dusty arcades bangin' them pleasure machines"* – seem as much designed to gee himself into action as to woo the titular smalltown goddess. Indeed, he seems to partially forget he was bent on seduction,

BOSSFACTS

★ In 1975, "4th Of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)" became the first Springsteen single outside the US. Released in Germany only, a printing error saw it entitled "Sandy (4th Of July, Asbury Park)"

★ The title of "Kitty's Back", from *The Wild, The Innocent*..., was inspired by a neon sign outside a Jersey Shore strip club



tangentially telling her about a waitress who's *"lost her desire for me"*, and comes around to an epiphany of what he really wants. *"For me this boardwalk life is through/You ought to quit this scene too."* He wants love but he also wants out of here. *"Love me tonight for I may never see you again"*. The wistful, intimate song became a live favourite for years, surviving even a filleted Hollies cover version in '75.

If "Sandy", as fans came to affectionately know it, was a quiet storm, "Kitty's Back" revved up the engines again and allowed the band to roar free. In a story involving the best character names outside Damon Runyon, Catlong pines for his ex-girlfriend Kitty, who ran off with Big Pretty. Drummer Vini "Mad Dog" Lopez, often criticised by those who prefer the later drumming of Max Weinberg, holds together an ambitious, sprawling rock/jazz suite that moves between tender and thunderous. At some point during this long hot summer, in which *"tin cans are exploding out of the 90 degree heat"*, the enigmatic Kitty comes back to town. *"Here she comes now,"* runs the knowingly evocative refrain. When Catlong catches a glimpse of his former love, he can't resist forgiving her: *"He just sits back and sighs/Ooh what can I do?"* As the epic track crescendos, Springsteen hollers, *"Kitty's back in town!"* with the vigour of Otis Redding. It was the first time the band had brought their live sense of theatrics to a recording: the open-ended mid-section (decorated by a Sancious organ solo here) became an extended showcase for each musician's talents in the live context. In subsequent concerts, as a centre-piece, it would go on for anything up to 20 minutes.

By stark contrast, "Wild Billy's Circus Story" is a loopy slice of oompah-oompah waltz that would have caused even Tom Waits to do a double take. Springsteen's use of a travelling circus as a metaphor for rock'n'roll life on the road as one of a team of dysfunctional players cleverly conveys both its thrills and bouts of loneliness. *"Jesus send some good women to save all your clowns."* His voice bristles with confidence. "This time of night at the carnivals," Bruce said onstage during a 1974 concert, "is when you start breaking it down to the real freaks." ("The Last Carnival", on 2009's *Working On A Dream*, serves as a kind of long-distance sequel to the story.)

Vibrant and varied as the album's first half is, it's on what used to be Side Two that Springsteen plays his trump cards. The three songs can be viewed as a connected suite, almost a rock-opera, though without the overblown pomp that connotes, churning through many diverse locations and moods. Adam Duritz compared it to the second side of *Abbey Road*. "There's magic in the subject matter and everyone rises to the occasion."

It's Leonard Bernstein's Jets and Sharks updated and rebooted. In the keening "Incident On 57th Street", Spanish Johnny and Puerto Rican Jane are the star-crossed lovers, while the observer Bruce narrates the ups and downs of the *"cool Romeo"* and *"late Juliet"*. *"You can leave me tonight,"* allows Jane, *"but just don't leave me alone."* At the dénouement we pan back from bedroom close-ups and fire escapes to a wide street panorama: a device Springsteen was to perfect on "Jungleland". Huge yet loose, the track is truly great, not least for the halfway break where it cuts down to just vocal and Garry Tallent's bass, nor for Danny Federici's keyboard lines on the choruses. When the track ends with *"meet you tomorrow night on Lover's Lane"*, we want to be there, to see what happens.

But then we're swept away by "Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)", an autobiographical rollercoaster and a live lynchpin for many years afterwards. A sassy, tongue-in-cheek, libidinous tale of a wannabe rock star and his forbidden love affair with a girl whose parents disapprove of him and his career choice, it sparkles with fun and impish digressions. Now one of the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame's "Songs That Shaped Rock And Roll", its life-affirming exuberance was to play a primary role in selling Springsteen worldwide. He has his narrative nailed, the band are pumping. Clarence Clemons is starting to show how important he will be to the E Street Band's finest moments. Again there are pleas to flee: *"We're gonna make that highway run"* and *"Winners use the door – so use it Rosie, that's what it's there for."* And then there's the immortal, candid peak where the singer puffs out his chest and brags, *"A record company, Rosie, just gave me a big advance!"* George P Pelecanos reckoned, "This one has it all: youth, love, and the redemptive power of music, expressed in the music itself. One of the great primal rock'n'roll performances, and as close to a perfect song as anyone's ever recorded."

"New York City Serenade" is infinitely more subdued and subtle, yet every bit as vast in scope and achievement. Its narrative is unclear, but its soft refrains (*"Walk tall, or baby don't walk at all"*) and a neo-gospel call-and-response break of *"No she won't take the train"* gather their own momentum. It's a flowing, fluid track, beautifully played with gorgeous acoustic guitar fills, which works through suggestion rather than direct statement: it evolved from rough drafts of other songs, and bears the spirit of beatnik prose. Springsteen would play the song as an encore even though it drew at best a shrugging response. "It's important: it closes the set for me," he told Robert Hilburn. "When I walk down the steps afterwards, I feel complete."

For all its merits the album still didn't establish a viable presence for Springsteen in the marketplace, selling about 50,000 in its first year. Only healthy reviews ("Could be the one to vault him to stardom," reckoned *Billboard*) kept him in Columbia's good books, and even then they made him demo a new track before green-lighting a third album. He demoed "Born To Run", and even then they weren't sure. Luckily, Jon Landau wrote his much-misquoted "I saw rock and roll's future" line in May 1974, and by July the record label decided it might be smart to use that in placing the first ever ads for *The Wild, The Innocent*... Suddenly, the hype was on.

So a new chapter began. Before it did, Bruce mused of his second album, later *Rolling Stone*'s 132nd best album of all time, "I'm surprised it didn't do better, because it sounded very commercial to me. I'd like to get out of the situation where I haven't paid the band for three weeks. Rents are due, and alimony, and if we don't play every week we don't have money."

Someday – to paraphrase "Rosalita" – he would look back on this, and it would all seem funny. ✪

People and life jump from every groove of *The Wild, The Innocent*… as it straddles genres and dazzles with detail

THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ **"No two ways about it, the boy just cannot step back to avoid that kind of greasy rococo overkill – he thrusts as much imagery as he can into one song until it all gets so bloated you don't even want to know what's going on…"** NICK KENT, NME, FEBRUARY 2, 1974

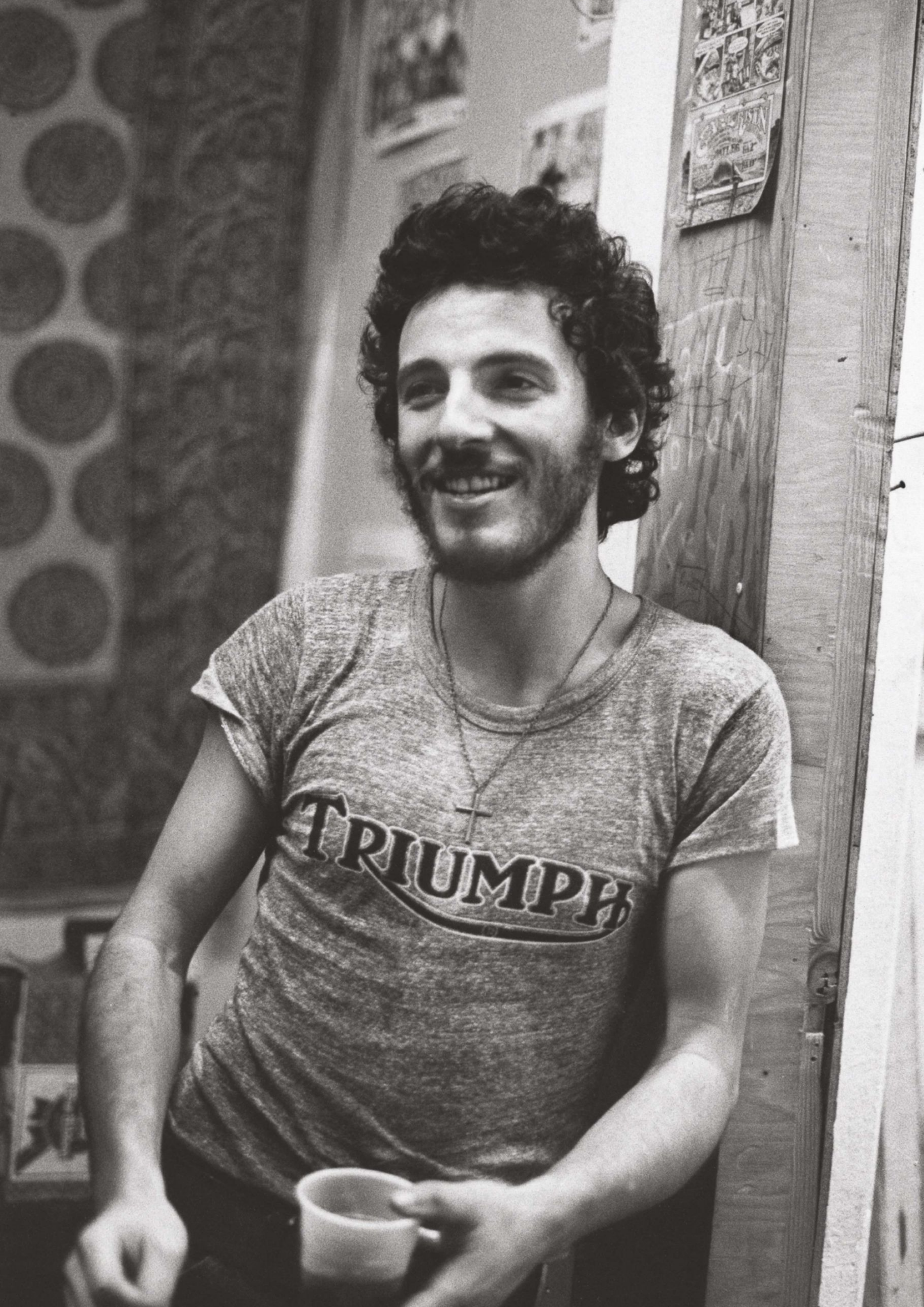
★ **"There are some beautiful and powerful lines. Springsteen grabs you by the collar straight off, sparks fly. He is a giant talent."** MELODY MAKER, FEBRUARY 9, 1974

'YOU HAVE TO BE SELF-CONTAINED. THAT WAY YOU DON'T GET PUSHED AROUND'

Britain is introduced to rock's "next superstar". MICHAEL WATTS hitches a ride on the E Street Band's bus as they leave a trail of awestruck new fans through the dancehalls, amusement arcades and party houses of Texas

TAKEN FROM
MELODY MAKER
NOVEMBER 30 | 1974

STEPHANIE CHERNIKOWSKI/REDFERNS


TRIUMPH

HE WANTS A SHOT AT THE BIG TITLE, as they say, and in turn a growing number of people would like to see him take that crown that has been bobbing from head to head of every rock'n'roll champ in the past two decades. In their minds he's the logical contender, the new golden boy of rock'n'roll, who's finally emerged from the fastnesses of New Jersey bars and campus halls to bid for the public's heart.

You talk to almost anybody in New York now and what do they say? "Bruce Springsteen! Oh, sure, he's great. But, sugar, you've seen NUTHIN'. You shoulda been there TWO YEARS AGO when he was playing at the Student Prince in Asbury Park. THAT was really somethin'."

And so on, blah, blah, blah, New Yorkers always being like that after the event.

But in Texas, that big Lone Star state brooding southwest on the map, where the news takes a while to filter down, it's hard to be blasé. Especially when the rain is falling in gut-buckets.

"Springstein, you say? Jewish fella?" We-ell, no. Of Dutch origin, actually, a Catholic but we'll let it pass.

It's not their fault. Bruce Springsteen has only just begun to break big anywhere, to touch that vital psychic nerve of a mass audience which sets the ball rolling, and no-one can be absolutely sure why it's happening now, though those who've seen him lately instinctively feel his rapport with the goddess of fortune.

Two years ago however, when that benign spirit John Hammond signed him to Columbia Records, the press mostly snickered up their sleeves about the "new Bob Dylan". Springsteen replied with his manic-euphoric grin, and then they wrote him off as some kind of Dr Demento.

"Madman drummers bummers and Indians in the summer with a teenage diplomat" – they always picked up on that first, and wildly off, line from his first album, *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ*, and dismissed the rest as junk in some sort of summary tribunal.

After all, surely you had to be a nut, or gobbling bennies, or some misdirected/informed Dylan disciple to write like that, didn't you?

To his credit – or perhaps he was just oblivious – Springsteen hung on in, sustained by kind words from worshippers who had seen him in his long-haired, bar-band days back in Asbury and thereabouts, plus new fans who were jolted back by the fierce, jumping current of his personality, with its foggy mumblings and inpenetrabilia, the feisty stance of the street punk and those lyrics that leaped at the inner ear with their roll-call of weird, vibrant characters – Wild Billy, Crazy Janey, Rosalita, Weak Knees Willie and the whole steamy essence of Latin streetlife that wafted out from the kitchen of his imagination.

He stuck to it the only way a musician can – he kept on playing even though other bands took fright at him and wouldn't, increasingly, use him as a support in case they were blown away – and a double difficulty here, because he was opposed anyway to gigs with heavy rock acts and their attendant zombie audiences.

Finally, he had a job getting booked anywhere outside New York and New Jersey. But he didn't seem unduly bothered because, as he often said, he'd as soon play to 15 people as 1,500 if the music was right.

Although the second album, *The Wild, The Innocent And The E Street Shuffle*, sold more than the first, Springsteen had still not really registered as the major artist Columbia and John Hammond had prophesied, and Hammond – everybody always brought this up – had been the guy who brought Dylan to the label a decade before.

The presence of the Minnesota Kid did seem in all truth to loom uncomfortably over any young unfortunate who had aspirations even circumstantially, to the crown.

Just because he was new, and he had the beard and the hair… it was too bad, it really was, and him not even Jewish. Springsteen, in fact, only owned a few Dylan singles – being too shy to ask his record company for the catalogue – and he'd never even seen Dylan perform, since Bobby hadn't made it to Asbury before the motorcycle disaster.

They still said he'd been influenced by him – well, if you were healthy at all, he reasoned, you'd better be influenced by him!

And then, in the middle of this year, the numbers appeared to click in a perfect combination. No longer playing to chickpeas and shell steaks at Max's Kansas City, that downturn pitch for wide-eyed tourists, he and his E Street Band were booked in July into the posh Bottom Line club, Greenwich Village's finest and the kind of place where CBS president Goddard Lieberson might feel more at home.

In the space of a couple of nights the boast of his manager, Mike Appel, that this scruffy kid with the perpetual grin was the "finest actor/artist in the history of rock'n'roll" could no longer be laughed off on the rock gossip circuit, but had to be fed for analysis into the critical computer.

A top-notch American rock critic had already come out with his own strip of tickertape proclaiming Springsteen as "the future of rock'n'roll".

In New York, at least nobody laughed after that, nobody said it was "Bellevue rock" any more. At concerts girls threw red roses to him in a Spanish love tryst, stages buckled from too many vociferous feet.

And a lot of people began remarking, "do you remember that time we went out to New Jersey, and there was that band….?"

TO BE FAIR, it was certainly true that Springsteen's performance had developed in a year since he was Upstairs at Max's.

At New York's Avery Fisher Hall in October what once were mannerisms had flowered into a perfect synchromesh of rock'n'roll ballet – theatrics without the tricks, movements and dances assimilated from old '60s soul revues, bits of stage business with the drummer and the black tenorist, a gift for mimicry, and this big, dramatic whisper that Springsteen employed as one weapon in his vocal armoury – a whisper roughed out hoarse and attractive, played off against an acoustic piano and a violin at certain sections in his performance.

More than ever, too, it was apparent that his musical roots were embedded in the thundering symphonies of Spectorland, secured especially in the styles of Spector's girlie groups: in the Crystals and Ronnie and The Ronettes, several of the girls themselves from New Jersey, of course. One of his proudest possessions, it later emerged, was a signed colour photograph of Ronnie Spector.

Springsteen's heart, evidently, was back there in the '50s and early '60s. His poetic intellect had absorbed the songwriting advances of the '60s and '70s – those knotty problems of metre and internal rhyme – but he intuitively anticipated in his new audiences the response for that uncluttered, emotional freshness embodied in a song like "Then He Kissed Me".

The number, in fact with which he closed his Avery Hall show that night was the old, joyful rabble-rouser, Gary Bonds' "Quarter To Three".

In those few months since the Bottom Line performances his album sales have started to pick up in America, especially those of his second record, which has gone past the 80,000 mark. Still, that isn't too great; by big league standards it's even a failure.

So the people who know about these things are forever badgering him to bring in a big-time producer instead of Mike Appel, someone like Richard Perry, maybe, or Bob Johnston, or… or Spector.

Springsteen says no, summoning a rueful smile for his elders and betters. He and Appel managed it okay together, as far as he's concerned. All his records had been commercial, he thought, and no sounds had gone down he disagreed with.

Although there's a smell of burning somewhere, he remains very loyal to Appel,

BOSSFACTS

Shortly after the release of his first album, Springsteen was drafted in at the 11th hour as part of Chuck Berry's pick-up band at a gig in Maryland. Berry spoke only once to Bruce, midway through the set, shouting, "Play for your money, boy!" Springsteen later claimed he was never paid

while Appel announces, in very precise tones, that his artist's "presence on stage dwarfs any musical attempt on vinyl. Any album is a disaster in comparison."

His record company, meanwhile, bites its nails and waits for the release of the third album in the early part of next year.

Other artists, maybe, will break his songs first. David Bowie has recorded "Growing Up" and "It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City", The Hollies have done "4th Of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)" and Allan Clarke "If I Were The Priest".

But Springsteen doesn't want to be just a fat cat on some publisher's shelf. He's looking for the main action.

OF THESE MUSICAL politics, however, the good people of Austin, Texas, know nothing, though the name of Bruce Springsteen is well remembered from a gig last year at the Armadillo World Headquarters, a big, 2,000-capacity club that likes to think of itself as a Fillmore in a city with pretensions to the cultural cosiness of old-time San Francisco.

Austin, situated on the Colorado river in the Texan interior, if that's the phrase, plays home to Doug Sahm and the 40,000-student University of Texas, and once, indeed, to Charles Whitman, who from the top of a tower near the main drag rifled 14 people to death.

Kinky Friedman, another Texan, and a Jew to boot, wrote a catchy ballad about it; that's one way to achieve immortality.

During the day a travelling band in this city might occupy itself looking through a number of thrift shops for old 45s and 78s on Dial, Duke/Peacock, Josie and other, more arcane labels.

But at night after a cloudburst the visitor is greeted only with streets dripping empty and miserable, surfaces black and shiny, with the neon strips of hamburger joints little more than cold comfort.

We find Springsteen late at night in the Fun Arcade on Main Street, which is where one would have expected him arriving in a strange town.

He's literally running from game to game – from the pool tables, to the pinfootball – at which the Tex-Mex kids are so adept – to Pong (the official name for "television tennis"), and on to Air Hockey, a two player game that involves slamming a puck between goalmouths across an air-cushioned tabletop.

He's a small guy, about five foot seven, with a deceptively rumpled, sleepy face – deceptive because he's winning at all these games.

Tufts of curly hair grow out from under a grey cloth 'po' boy cap, his skin is sallow, and the beard is scraggy. But with his rubbed jeans, beat-up leather jacket, and this hat tipped raffishly over one eye, he becomes at second glance something quite charismatic… a pool hall hustler, a '50s runaway, floating cool with his hard-earned savvy, the kind of character that Kerouac would immediately have recognised and set down.

A peculiarly anachronistic air clings to Springsteen. After observing him a few moments shooting pool and rattling up big scores with much intensity, I start to think he should've been a beat poet himself, hopping on boxcars around America, sharing a bottle of wine with ol' Ti Jean and the hobos out in the yards and then writing down his fleeting sensations, each rush of thought, on scraps of paper he stuffed about his clothes.

That was another age, when electric guitars weren't so common, but Springsteen still gives off this heady whiff of pristine romance, of nostalgia for a wide-open America that this rock generation has never known, some outlaw quality of adventuring that cuts right across all this business of middle-class white boys leaving school to sing black men's music.

PETER CUNNINGHAM/GEMS/REDFERNS

"So I've learned to really flow with it on the surface. I can roll with the punches. It's a way of getting along"

And again, the well-thumbed line comes straight to mind, that nobody ever taught him how to live out on the street. Because he already knew, knew instinctively.

On the Thursday morning, when the *New York Times* calls the Sheraton Inn in Austin, Springsteen turns to the man from CBS and asks if he's really got to do the interview.

"It's only 10 minutes of your life."

"But why?"

"It can help you. They want to do a big story."

Springsteen brightens at a sudden thought. "You got the wheels, right? Okay, let's get out and play. Lets go get some hamburgers" – his favourite food, since fancy cuisine makes him uncomfortable.

He treats the CBS man to a hoarse, compulsive chuckle. His voice has a husk on it like a kernel.

"You really should talk to him. It is the *New York Times*."

There's a pause before he grumbles assent. "Aw, okay."

Springsteen avoids interviews if he can, apparently not out of Bolshevism or any attempt to envelop himself in mystique, but because he finds it hard to adjust to the brittle game of question and answer, of careful probing, smart deceptions and double-guessings that are supposed to elicit some approximation of the truth. He is too real to put his faith in the glamour of headlines, too mindful of his privacy to undervalue his personal feelings at the sight of a notebook or tape recorder.

This attitude is really a corollary of his dislike of rock stardom, which he professes to find as meaningless as most rock stars are unappealing to him.

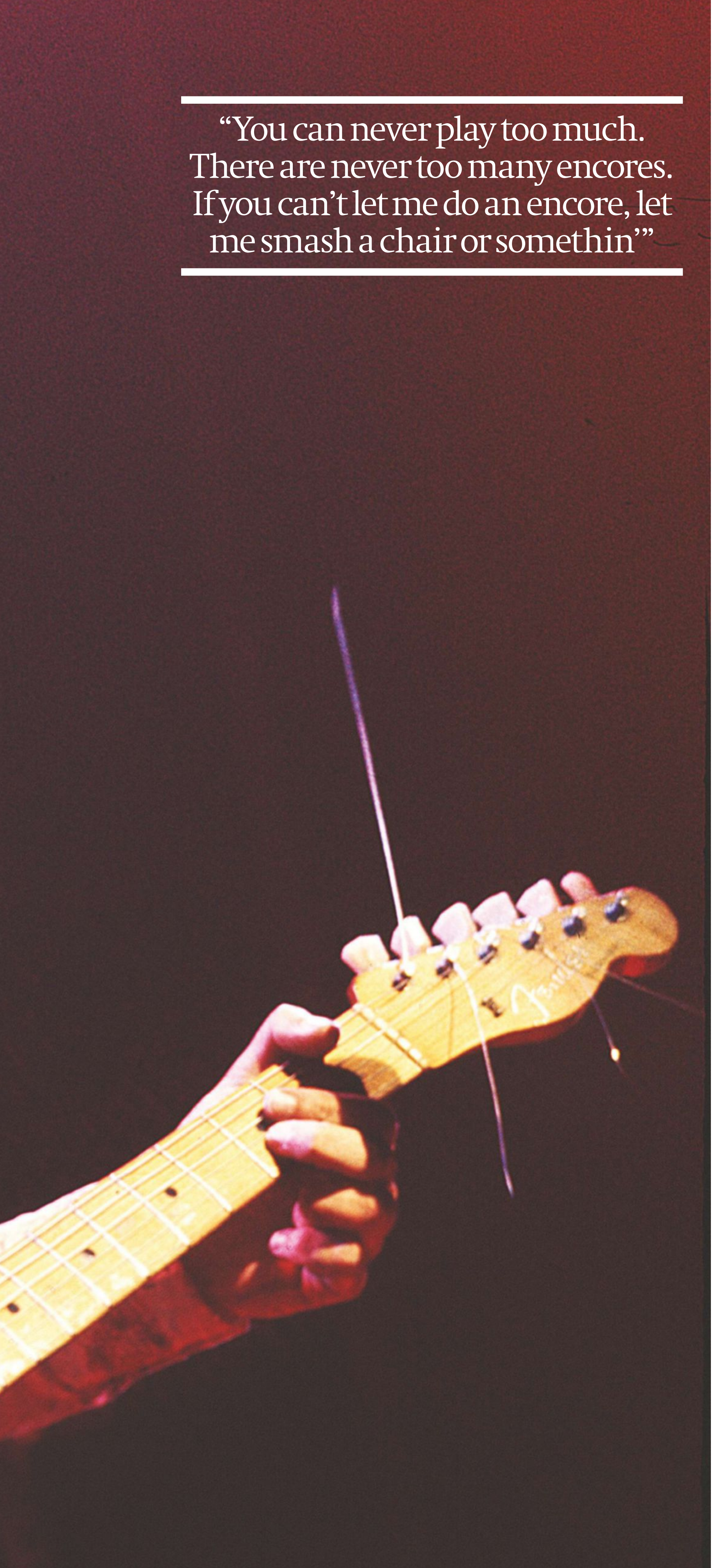
They're jokes, hoaxes, gyps, he's fond of saying, because every other person can be one if he's willing to surrender himself to a public relations man.

"They're just people who wanna crawl back in the womb," he will say, "people who have built their own reality and are afraid of reality itself." Being a rock star was letting yourself be controlled, and that way you cheated yourself.

So no, he doesn't ever want to be a big, hyped-up rock star, playing Madison Square Garden, where the kids need binoculars to see him. "I hope somebody shoots me offstage," he says "if they ever see me there, because then I'll deserve it."

The band, guys who've been out on the road for some years, several of them with Springsteen, are less sure of what's involved. The organist, for one, Danny Federici, a taciturn, sandy-haired man who also played with Bruce in a group called Steel Mill back in the old Jersey days.

"I don't know what to think of the whole thing," he says. "I don't even know CONTINUES OVER »



> "You can never play too much. There are never too many encores. If you can't let me do an encore, let me smash a chair or somethin'"

what to think of the way the audiences respond. I know Bruce is good, I know that, but I don't really understand what it is, or how they let it all out the way some of the people do for our concerts."

Still, it's essentially Springsteen's responsibility. He supervises the music as totally as he orchestrates the audience's emotions, and the E Street Band is a group in which personal expression has to be sublimated in the collective effort in which there's a group sound and infrequent soloing, since one of Springsteen's musical ideals is the sound-mesh that Dylan achieved on his electric albums.

Only Danny, briefly, gets a large slice of the spotlight, just as it was Al Kooper alone who was allowed to rise out of the mix on "Highway 61".

Springsteen has picked them all carefully. The bassist, Garry W Tallent, has been with him since '71 when Bruce led another band of Jersey renown, Dr. Zoom And The Sonic Boom.

The pianist, Roy Bittan, arrived in September after longtime keyboardsman Davey Sancious became too idiosyncratic with his prepared piano pieces and iconoclastic Debussy style, while the present drummer Max Weinberg was auditioned around the same time.

He's a number one pupil of Pretty Purdie, and, among other occupations, an ex-Broadway pit player (*The Magic Show* and *Godspell*), showbiz experience that Springsteen particularly utilises in his rapid number of time switches and off-the-cuff routines.

But the main man is Clarence Clemons, a big, imposing black tenorist, who was a football player with the Cleveland Browns until he got a leg injury, and who once held down a spot as one of James Brown's Famous Flames.

Clarence also sings harmonies, and he's a kind of foil for Springsteen, this huge dude, standing front left setting off the diminutive singer – Clarence in his white suit, black shirt and hat, with the shades, counterpointing this skinny, hungry-looking kid who looks as if he's been leaning on fire hydrants all his life. The band is as tight as the fingers on a hand, all living within 10 miles of each other in New Jersey, near the beach and not far from Asbury Park, just so's rehearsals will be easier to arrange

ON THURSDAY AT the Armadillo there are no visiting dignitaries, but the audience is greater than the previous evening's, a crowd of tall Texan gals and young longhairs in dirty-cream cowboy hats cocked back on their heads, in their hands huge pitchers of pale beer which they slop in the glasses of whoever is standing near.

It's a crowd that wants to boogie and crack those empty cans of Lone Star beer under their scuffed boot-heels in this large barn of a joint, warm but still redolent of the rainy night outside.

So they're unprepared and somewhat off-balance when Springsteen walks out in his battered duds with little, scholarly Roy, the pianist, and Suki, who just happens to be the wife of his sound engineer, Louis Lehav, and spent time in the Israeli Youth Ork – this slight, tiny blonde, a heart-stealer in rolled-up denims and boots, a thumbnail sketch of charming, fragile femininity, who crooks a violin in her shoulder.

And Bruce, in his muscle T-shirt CONTINUES OVER »

NEAL PRESTON/RETNA

with his hair haloed by the lighting, a tender John Garfield characterisation with one hand fingering the veins in his arm, eyes hooded in shades, Bruce starts in on his uptown drama of a Spanish Johnny, sad-eyed Romeo figure, looking for a sweet word from his girl, all the sounds of the city in the song, with the violin like a breath of night wind across the West River.

And the cowpokes, even if they're all maths students most likely at university, cease their crunching and slurping. *"And from the shadows came a young girl's voice, that said: 'Johnny don't cry'…"*

Springsteen whispering over the mic in a long moment of total magnetic concentration, until on the last piano note, a single, delicate droplet, the crowd bellows out its huge roar of rough approval.

And from that instant Springsteen has them, Austin and Texas, by the horns, all out to ride the emotions off 'em.

He always performs this single song, "Incident On 57th Street", as his opening number, and then brings on the rest of his band: Clemons, clutching his gleaming horn; Garry Tallent, vaguely Leon Russell with his flowing brown hair and beard; Max's face virtually obscured by the hovering cymbals, and Danny on last, the sandy moustache with its hint of truculence, sitting right across the stage from Roy Bittan.

They ease out with the familiar Crystals oldie, altered naturally to "Then She Kissed Me", and then Bruce's own "Spirit In The Night", Clemons and Tallent on the harmonies, a rasping big band sound, Weinberg driving and hopping them along, Bruce skinny-legging it around the stage, and the audience fully twitching now, caught in the spill of the event.

The music is truly overwhelming, a wild, heady mixture of lyrical mosaics refracted through a warm glow of nostalgia, memories of nights spent listening to the radio under the bed covers, when music was undiluted and young, the same, almost forgotten stab of joy, but undeniably '70s R'n'B, the music brought clean and wailing into the present times and suggesting at every other turn the influence of jazz and Latin sounds.

The measure of its exciting effect is its refusal to be pinned down, but for me at least it touches some sensitive chord, submerged deep in the rubble of the subconscious, that's exhilarating but also disturbing, because it's rarely exposed so completely.

I listen to Springsteen like I used to listen to Dylan, John Lennon and Chuck Berry – as though a life depended on it and no more can be said than that.

Just one impressive factor about Bruce Springsteen is his encyclopaedic knowledge of rock'n'roll and the intuitive use to which he puts it.

Eddie Cochran brushes shoulders with The Crickets and Bo Diddley, Phil Spector appears all over the place, and in the live version of "Rosalita" he throws in a Four Tops riff.

On "Sandy" he even uses Federici on accordion, possibly inspired by the Beach Boys' "God Only Knows". But the noise and smells of street-life crowd in on him. I shut my eyes and I can see those dirty New York yellow cabs, nosing in wolfpacks down the hot asphalt on Eighth Avenue, the charred stink of bagels in the air. Manhattan or those tacky towns of New Jersey, he hasn't wandered far from either.

"It's hard to be a saint in the city," he sings with an edge of pride, a sentiment chock-full of New York attitudinising.

Tough cops, bar fights, jukebox pimps, alleyways, Harleys, greasers, filthy denims, circuses, boardwalks, Spanish razorboys, trains and tenements – this is his literary stomping ground.

BOSSFACTS

Springsteen has never had a No 1 single in the US, although the Manfred Mann's Earth Band cover of Asbury Park's "Blinded By The Light" hit the top spot in early 1977

SPRINGSTEEN, BORN IN Freehold, New Jersey, lives these days in an outlying district of Asbury called West End. Asbury Park is a seaside town in Eastern New Jersey, with a population about 50 per cent black, and crammed in the summer with tourists who haven't got the money to go to Atlantic City up the coast.

It was the usual story. His mother had bought him a guitar when he was nine, but he hadn't taken it seriously until he was 13 around the tail-end of that golden age of rock'n'roll, and just before The Beatles arrived to whip up every white kid's latent fantasy of success in the adult world.

Elvis, The Chiffons, Sam Cooke, The Shirelles, Chuck Berry, The Isley Brothers – every night he went home and put those babies on the record player, seeking out that release promised in the black grooves.

Rock'n'roll, he swore, was what kept him from going nuts, but it was the genuine, horny old stuff he dug. The Beatles were pop, the Stones he stopped buying after *December's Children*. Something to do with the fancy production.

He was in and out of various bands, even making nightly trips to the Café Wha? in Greenwich Village, but his first important group was Child.

Danny Federici was another member, Bruce was 18, and the band went off to San Francisco and cut a four-hour tape for Bill Graham's Fillmore Records – so good, according to Federici, that Graham offered their manager $2,000 to sign, which wasn't considered enough.

They came back and changed their name to Steel Mill, playing heavy rock, and picked up a reputation in Jersey towns, where they could play to two and three thousand people a time for $500 and 50 per cent of the gate, even without a record company.

He wrote a lot more those days. Every weekend the band had a new repertoire. And he was into the image, sexy with his shoulder-length hair and his guitar slung low, low down.

Until one night it wasn't enough any longer. They were a big local act, and yet one evening Bruce walks onstage and he doesn't feel it any more, it's almost as if he were parodying himself, and there and then he decides to bust it up.

It was hard on Federici. His wife had just left him and here was Bruce saying it was all over. He still has this mental picture of himself stuck in his hallway with his suitcase, trying to figure where to go next. The next two years he never played with anyone unless they paid him upfront, he felt so hurt.

As for Springsteen, he set up another band, Dr Zoom And The Sonic Boom, which included Garry Tallent and practically everyone else he knew who could play an instrument.

He was still searching for the right vehicle, and then hitched his name to a 10-piece band, loaded with horns and R'n'B riffs, that eventually whittled itself down to seven, and then to five.

They had been friendly for a time with Looking Glass, seen how they hit the jackpot with "Brandy", a No 1 American single, and wondered why they weren't hitting it, with Bruce writing these great, colourful songs – and wondered especially why Tinker, Springsteen's manager from way back, hadn't ever clinched that record deal.

A vote was taken, and one morning Springsteen went sorrowfully back to the surfboard factory where he and Tinker lived, and delivered the black spot. The guy was fixing his truck, underneath it. He didn't say a word. It was through him that Springsteen met Mike Appel.

BY THE TIME we've all boarded the group bus that Friday morning, ready to leave rained-out Austin, a rather unnerving change has swept through the whole party.

Five or six of us are wearing hats like Springsteen's, bought in town from the Texas Hatter and pulled down low over one ear in the true style of the Depression era, so that we resemble young Okies, or the Little Rascals, depending on your imagination.

Springsteen looks amused at his groupies, but he never says a word. From this point, leather jackets, jeans and caps, beat up and lived in, become a uniform.

The bus pulls out at midday on its 200-mile trek to Corpus Christi, a town on the Gulf Of Mexico which combines, one is led to understand, the palm-treed pleasures of a resort with the financial income of oil refineries.

Just above Springsteen's bunk, where he's curled up in a blanket, a single red rose hangs from the roof, a tribute cast by an admirer at the Tower Theatre in Philadelphia. CONTINUES OVER »

> "I eat loneliness, man. I feed off it. I live on a lotta different levels, y'know, because I've learned to cope with people, which is — be cool"

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY

But Bruce is suspended in his own uneasy limbo, drained of sleep by the previous two days' performances.

He dreams he's being driven across a rough landscape and up a huge mountain, slowly and terrifyingly, because the incline is vertical. And it stops, and he's poised, safety resting on a clenched breath, his body almost upside down, jagged edges below…

When he awakens, sweaty and anxious, to cars speeding by on the highway, he fishes around for an explanation of the dream. "And the mountain was named Success, right?" grins one of the party.

He explains that during a performance he has to fulfil two needs, the physical and the emotional, and that sometimes you do one, sometimes the other, but usually you fall short on both. Inside himself he envisions these little gates, and throughout the performance he goes through each one until BOOM! – the big release! But always there's another one there, always just one, and the intensity of the feeling burns in his stomach, needing to be released, because performing is the only thing he ever does in his life and he has to go all the way with it.

His philosophy is, you have to drain yourself, your band, and your audience, and in its place the performer leaves something else, an indefinable something. But for all parties it's the sense of release that's important. Music is simply the modus operandi.

"Because," he will elaborate, "a movie, music, a book – whatever – everybody uses these things to satisfy a need. Creating is a release in itself. Everything's a release.

"That's what it's about in society – you gotta get released," laughing at his own intensity.

"That's what everybody wants, that's why the audience come, man. They don't come to say, 'Hey you're great!' or to be jived with rock stars and stuff – they might not even know why they come – but they come to get release, to be set free.

"They think they're gonna get something they need, and it's gotta be more than just jump up and down and 'boogie, boogie!'

"What happens is that people cheat themselves and they don't know it. I would never cheat myself. If you don't cheat yourself you don't cheat anybody. You can never play too much, for example, there are never too many encores.

"If you can't let me do an encore let me smash a chair or somethin'. I don't know if there's ever enough of a release. Maybe it comes when you die, the Ultimate Release…"

IN CORPUS CHRISTI that night, where he's topping the bill over old Sir Douglas Quintet organist, Augie Meyers, the local cat from San Antonio, he does four encores, even though there are only 300 people in the 1,700 seater Ritz Theatre.

There's been no airplay on him, no announcements, no advertising. As a word of mouth he's a whisper down here in darkest Texas… but the audience is ecstatic going totally bananas in this bare, white-bricked theatre that was built back in the 1920s as a vaudeville hall.

And Springsteen gushes, coming off really high, saying, "No, man, it doesn't matter how many are there. Sometimes it's even better when there's not a lot there. You get off on yourself and the band."

He knows that next time he played here it would be full; but it's unlikely there will be a next time.

For this is an altogether grey, creepy town. Several years ago a hurricane blew in from the Gulf and took Corpus away with it, and though the physical scars have been patched up, in spirit, it's only one graduation from a ghost town. So much for sun-kissed beaches. The resort has shut down for winter, the air is clammy with cold.

So no-one was unhappy to leave that alien town for Houston, a wide, expanding sprawl of a city, not unlike Los Angeles in its centreless architectural concept. Sitting, later, in his Houston hotel room, Springsteen can look back on his Corpus performance and say, "I had a good time, but right now it seems like a kind of a void. It didn't seem complete enough."

If only he could have done a final encore, he broods, the show at the Houston Music Hall might have come close to the perfect emotional dissolve that he's seeking.

But the management's fear of the unions prevented them performing and he wanders off dejectedly as the audience swarms out, upset that he's not physically spent, that there's energy left with no place to go…

> **BOSSFACTS**
>
> When The Hollies covered "4th Of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)", the band met Springsteen after a show at The Bottom Line in New York and asked him to take them to a bar serving English beer. According to drummer Bobby Elliott, Bruce passed out after three pints of Bass bitter

SO LATE THIS Saturday evening, in Houston's downtown Holiday Inn, Bruce Springsteen is slowly shaking off his post-performance blues and equalising his emotions.

He's saying that when he gets back to New Jersey he has to make a lot of changes in the band, to get more depth. He feels he's just on the perimeter of what he should be doing.

But perhaps inside he's remembering that night years ago when he walked out onstage and suddenly found he was only parodying himself, that it had become a bore. He's only too aware now of how he needs that shiny hit record to sustain his momentum, that elusive combustible which will break open another door that took him into rock'n'roll and off the streets.

And yet change is all around him. He spends long weeks on the road now. He will see less and less of Asbury Park which, though now millionaire's row, has been a big source of inspiration for his music. He's rarely written on the road before, but he'll have to adjust. His consciousness is developing. He has to work it all out. He's a guy who might have gone bad, or just become a bum, but found this little seed within himself and learned what makes it grow, till he's filled up inside with lots of different goodies.

Everybody has it, but most people never figure it out. Springsteen says his father was one of those. "And there are guys still out there, guys my age, guys a lot older."

So with this perspective he sees his function, his role, if he has any at all, as one of trying to show people some quality, some emotion, that is real, and the way he tells it is less pompous than it sounds.

He says, "You've got to be able to see yourself for what you are, and not until then can you improve on what you are and be what you want to be. But people throw it away for a hoax, the Big American Hoax. For me I can't deal with life in reference to governments and politics, I have to deal with it on a personal level.

"If you look at Bob Dylan, that's what he was doin'. 'Blowin' In The Wind' was all right, but I don't like it half as much as 'I Want You', 'Like A Rolling Stone' or anything on *Blonde On Blonde*.

"*'I want you'* – that's it, the ultimate statement you can make to anybody. What else can you say? And that's the greatest lyric in the song, those three words, in the whole damn song!

"I put that on, man, and I get blown away, I get blown down the street, 'cause there's no hoax there, it was real, real as hell."

In his own songs Springsteen tries for that same honesty, searching, however wildly, for some clear picture of himself. "I don't know what I'm writing from," he says, "but the main thing I've always been worried about was me.

"I had to write about me all the time, every song, 'cause in a way you're trying to find out what that 'me' is. That's why I choose where I grew up, where I live, and I take situations I'm in, and people I know and take 'em to the limits."

But in pursuing this self-discovery, away from the stage he's grown self-contained, untouched by people in the final analysis. Although easy and friendly, not a bit aloof, he's still a lone star, moving on his own, independent trajectory.

He's into none of the musician's usual trips – doping up, drinking and heavy womanising. The girls he meets on the road he never turns into groupies, to be discussed with appropriate lip-smacking noises in the bus next day. Dope was not even important to him as a teenager.

"People do it because their friends do it," he explains carefully, "and at the time I didn't have any friends in Asbury… I had a guy I'd see once and a while and a girl, but outside of that there was nobody, I wasn't in that circle.

"Consequently, I was oblivious to a lotta social pressures and stuff within the scene, 'cause I was on the outside, on the outside looking in… 'til I started to play, and then people come close to you. You don't go to them, they come to you."

He pauses, his hands rumpling through his hair. "But by then it was too late. I was totally involved in what I was doin', and I had no need for anything else, or for anybody. I was there, and that was it, for me."

He gets up and turns the television off and then he goes back to the bed, where he sits cross-legged.

"Y'know, you have to be self-contained. That way you don't get pushed around. It depends on what you need. I eat loneliness, man. I feed off it. I live on a lotta different levels, y'know, because I've learned to cope with people, which is – be cool all the time. I can do that, because… I've got so much going on inside to be upset over things that are trivial to me.

Monmouth College, Long Branch, New Jersey, April 18, 1974

"So I've learned to really flow with it on the surface. I can roll with the punches. It's a way of getting along."

Still he's in the ring now, moving up the rankings, with other managers fastening their beady eyes upon him. Suddenly it's become a big deal, and he needs all the help he can get. He and Appel battle it out together, managing on a shoestring, until The Breakthrough arrives.

One day he wants to have that big pile of money, wants to hold a million dollars in his hand, just to see what it's like.

And come that day, he's promised himself he'll ride in a limousine and go to some spiffy high society do, where they'll have to announce him.

Then – thinking dutifully – there's his mother who's worked every day since she was 17, and she's old now. He'd like her to stop – his old man, too. Oh – there's all kinds of dreams wrapped up in that million bucks. But mostly he knows what he wants, and it's to do with an attitude.

"I wanna be able to spit on the floor when I like," he says with passion. "I just don't wanna be controlled through the air, man. I wanna spit in the air…"

IN THE EARLY hours of Sunday morning, we confront ourselves at a celebration party held in Roberto's home, a large, wooden-frame building set back from the road amid thick, tall grass. The rain has stopped momentarily, but the vegetation on the drive swishes heavily.

Inside it's a great melee, with people crushed drunkenly together. Ice rattles in a big tub holding cans of beer. Over in one corner several people play gin-rummy on a big, battered old table. There are cigarettes stubbed out in the potato salad. The party is on its last legs…

BOSSFACTS

There are about 60 Springsteen tribute acts currently working in the US and Europe, including Tramps Like Us, The Rising and The B Street Band. The latter played at New Jersey governor Chris Christie's inaugural ball after Bruce declined the invitation

It's well after 3am when Roberto, mad Chicano that he is, portentously raises his hand and calls, in thunderous fashion, for silence. As the hubbub cuts out, he draws Bruce to him and makes a little speech about how honoured he is to have such a rising star in his home, he, Roberto.

And while Springsteen looks sheepish, the guests raise their cans of beer to him for a brief deep moment. Then someone coughs and the party limps to its close.

Later in the car back to the hotel, Springsteen says, "Do you know what he gave me?" And he pulls out of his pocket Roberto's absurd Lone Ranger mask. We all have a good laugh at that, and then we head out for the nearest hamburger joint, because Bruce is feeling very hungry by now. ✪

GEORGE TIEDEMANN/GT IMAGES/CORBIS

BORN TO RUN

"Rock and roll future" incarnate: the runaway American dream begins in earnest. BY ALASTAIR McKAY

25 AUGUST 1975

FOR HIS THIRD album, Bruce Springsteen put aside childish definitions of love and freedom. A deeply romantic work, *Born To Run* was marked out by its optimism, its lack of irony, and the two key questions which it implicitly posed. What do you do when your dreams come true? And, slightly more urgently, what do you do when they don't?

Born To Run changed Springsteen's life, and it changed his art. His first two albums were exhibition bouts, on which he had showed off his skills as a writer, but they were the work of a contender rather than a champion. In the process of bringing his songs to life, Springsteen was always struggling: to cut loose from the expectations of others; and to escape comparisons with Bob Dylan and Van Morrison. He had channelled streams-of-consciousness into a music which sprawled between soul, jazz and R'n'B, without ever knocking those genres into fundamentally new shapes. On *Born To Run*, he learned to dance.

It's not as if the record fell out of the sky fully formed. If anything, the influences are even more obvious than before. Roy Orbison gets a namecheck in the first verse of the first song, "Thunder Road" ("*…Singing for the lonely/Hey that's me, and I want you only*"), and there's no escaping the sense that "Born To Run", the song, is a krypton-tuned tribute to Phil Spector with – small triumph – the best use of a glockenspiel in rock history.

But listen closely to *Born To Run* – play it loud, acquiesce to its power – and you won't hear the constituent parts. What you hear is an artist finding his voice, and expressing it at the limits of its potential. You hear a singer informed by soul, but the roots of the music have been traced back through Van Morrison and Sam Cooke to a place where belief was a matter of life and death. This is church music, but the religion is rock'n'roll. That may sound corny, 35 years later, but Springsteen delivers the sermon without irony. His sincerity is a matter of faith.

You also hear a band drilled to submission, and a sound which makes the best use of the studio environment. The playing on the first two albums had loosely approximated the group's live act. For *Born To Run*, the stakes were higher. The hype was wearing thin, and this was Springsteen's last chance to live up to it. For Springsteen, the pressure was creative, too: he badly wanted to write something explosive. He wanted to be great. And that sense of urgency and direction infects every note.

The initial idea had been to come up with a concept album (possible titles: 'The Legend Of Zero', 'Blind Terry'), but Springsteen wisely discarded that thought, creating instead a suite of songs with a strong sense of continuity, almost as if the stories are

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Thunder Road ★★★★★
2 Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out ★★★★
3 Night ★★★★
4 Backstreets ★★★★★
5 Born To Run ★★★★★
6 She's The One ★★★★
7 Meeting Across The River ★★★★★
8 Jungleland ★★★★★

Released: August 25, 1975
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau, and Mike Appel, except "Born To Run", which was produced by Bruce Springsteen and Mike Appel
Recorded at: Record Plant Studio, NY, except "Born To Run", recorded at 914 Sound Studios, Blauvelt, NY
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (guitar, vocals, harmonica); Garry Tallent (bass guitar); Max Weinberg (drums); Roy Bittan (Fender Rhodes, glockenspiel, piano, harpsichord, organ); Clarence Clemons (sax); Ernest 'Boom' Carter (drums on "Born To Run"); David Sancious (keyboards on "Born To Run"); Danny Federici: (organ, glockenspiel on "Born To Run"); Steven Van Zandt (horn arrs on "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out", backing vocals on "Thunder Road"); Randy Brecker (trumpet, flugelhorn on "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out", trumpet on "Meeting Across The River"); Michael Brecker (tenor sax on "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out"); Dave Sanborn (baritone sax on "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out"); Wayne Andre (trombone on "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out"); Suki Lahav (violin on "Jungleland")
Highest chart position: UK 17; US 3

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
BORN TO RUN

THUNDER ROAD
Bruce Springsteen: guitar, vocals, harmonica
Garry Tallent: bass guitar
Max M. Weinberg: drums
Roy Bittan: Fender Rhodes, glockenspiel
Clarence Clemons: saxophones
Background vocals: Roy Bittan,
Mike Appel, Steve Van Zandt
TENTH AVENUE FREEZE-OUT
Bruce Springsteen: guitar, vocals
Garry Tallent: bass guitar
Max M. Weinberg: drums
Roy Bittan: piano
Clarence Clemons: tenor saxophone
†Randy Brecker: trumpet, flugel horn
†Michael Brecker: tenor saxophone
**Dave Sanborn: baritone saxophone
Wayne Andre: trombone
NIGHT
Bruce Springsteen: guitar, vocals
Garry Tallent: bass guitar
Max M. Weinberg: drums
Roy Bittan: piano, harpsichord, glockenspiel
Clarence Clemons: saxophone
BACKSTREETS
Bruce Springsteen: guitar, vocals
Garry Tallent: bass guitar
Max M. Weinberg: drums
Roy Bittan: piano, organ
*BORN TO RUN
Bruce Springsteen: guitar, vocals
Garry Tallent: bass guitar
Ernest "Boom" Carter: drums
*David Sancious: keyboards
Danny Federici: organ
Clarence Clemons: saxophone
SHE'S THE ONE
Bruce Springsteen: guitar, vocals
Garry Tallent: bass guitar
Max M. Weinberg: drums
Roy Bittan: piano, harpsichord, organ
Clarence Clemons: saxophone
MEETING ACROSS THE RIVER
Bruce Springsteen: vocals
Roy Bittan: piano
Richard Davis: bass
†Randy Brecker: trumpet
JUNGLELAND
Bruce Springsteen: guitar, vocals
Garry Tallent: bass guitar
Max M. Weinberg: drums
Roy Bittan: piano, organ
Clarence Clemons: tenor saxophone
Strings arranged and conducted by Charles Calello
†Appear courtesy of Arista Records
*Appears courtesy of Epic Records
**Appears courtesy of Warner Reprise
PRODUCED BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, JOHN LANDAU, AND MIKE APPEL
*PRODUCED BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, AND MIKE APPEL
Stereo
CBS
69170

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CBS
BORN TO RUN
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
S 69170 A
33⅓ RPM
STEREO
1
S 69170
(PC 33795)
℗ 1975 CBS Inc.
1. THUNDER ROAD (Time: 4.50)
2. TENTH AVENUE FREEZE-OUT (Time: 3.11)
3. NIGHT (Time: 3.01)
4. BACKSTREETS (Time: 6.29)
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
1-4. Intersong Music Ltd.
CBS & CBS INC.

happening in the same place on the same summer night.

The rebirth of Bruce involved a difficult labour, not least because *Born To Run* was the record on which Springsteen stopped relying on improvisation. It was constructed, then taken apart, and rebuilt until its architect felt satisfied. In the documentary *Wings For Wheels* there is footage of Springsteen counting down Clarence Clemons' saxophone solo on "Jungleland". The process lasted 16 hours, with Springsteen chiselling the solo into shape, and then rewriting it from behind the recording console. Such was the level of exhaustion in the studio that engineer Jimmy Iovine kept the tinfoil from his chewing gum handy, so that he could wake himself up by biting on it. Reflecting on the sessions, in which he was an interested observer and occasional sounding board rather than a full-time band member, Miami Steve Van Zandt noted dryly, "Fun's a tough word to use."

It was hard work. And while Springsteen's fondness for rough-hewn imagery has led to him being viewed as an artisan, it's worth stating clearly what he achieved. *Born To Run*, like all great works of art, seems inevitable in retrospect, even obvious. But it was the product of an obsession, born out of a moment of artistic clarity.

The title is a clue to Springsteen's ambition. In the mythology of rock'n'roll – a genre not much visited in 1974, when Californian singer-songwriters and glam rockers held sway – rebels were born to lose. Springsteen's anthemic title track is marginally more positive, if not entirely optimistic. In fact, the hope in the song exists at the level of a troubled dream. "*I wanna die with you out on the streets tonight*," he sings, "*in an everlasting kiss.*" David Bowie's "Heroes" would inhabit much the same fatalistic terrain three years later, but while Bowie would take his cues from the Berlin Wall, the Cold War and all that, Springsteen was elevating street poetry. The roots of the record may be autobiographical, but Springsteen's writing on *Born To Run* was no longer bounded by the tidelines of the Jersey Shore. The album is a work of mythology, film noir; pure Americana.

Recording began in early 1974 with the song "Born To Run". The rollercoaster melody took six months to perfect. The early takes are far from anthemic, offering little more than an anaemic Link Wray rumble. There were experiments with sound effects in which street cars and drag racers decorated the instrumental passages. And for a time, the wall of sound included synths and horns, angelic choruses, tambourines and strings. Ultimately, good sense prevailed, and Springsteen realised that the song's power was rooted in the twang of the guitars. "The strings took away some of the darkness," he said.

Springsteen's perfectionism also split the band. Keyboard player David Sancious and drummer Ernest 'Boom' Carter opted out, taking the jazzier flavourings with them, and forcing Springsteen to rethink his strategy. After extensive auditions – 30 drummers and 30 pianists, each playing for 30 minutes – pianist Roy Bittan and drummer Max Weinberg were recruited in September 1974, and Springsteen set about realising his dream.

First, the rhythm section had to be broken in, as the band worked to keep up with Springsteen's evolving demands. Previously, the players had been encouraged to indulge their extrovert tendencies. Now, discipline was required. Springsteen notes on the *Wings For Wheels* documentary film that everything was "starting to get pulled back in a slightly more ascetic direction".

If asceticism seems an odd word for the epic orchestrations of *Born To Run*, the discipline of the playing is obvious. The band was learning how to make the most of the studio, channelling its live energy, and eschewing spontaneity. This was an unusual approach in 1974, but Springsteen was harking back to his classic rock influences. The Ronettes never jammed. There's nothing spontaneous about a Roy Orbison ballad, apart from the way it makes the audience cry. So, Springsteen's aim was to achieve a complete sound, in which the power of the song would be paramount. "The idea was to be tight and bare, and the arrangements minimal," he said.

The lyrics were honed, with Dylanisms eschewed in favour of honing the blunt poetry of B-movie dialogue. "I became aware that I was working with classic rock'n'roll images that easily turned into clichés," Springsteen said.

Oddly, for a record with a battered electric guitar on the cover, the songs were composed on piano and consequently, the tunes are more tentative. They build slowly from woozy piano intros, swelling into epics. "The introductions were meant to make you feel that something auspicious was going to occur," he explained. Ultimately, Roy Bittan's piano would define the album's sound. But the chemistry was not instant. At first, the sessions with the new band were fruitless. If recording "Born To Run" had been traumatic, living up to its promise was doubly troublesome. The piano in the 914 Sound Studio was faulty, and frustration was mounting. Fresh blood was required.

That infusion of new ideas was supplied by Jon Landau, the *Rolling Stone* contributing editor whose love of the music had led him to hatch that albatross of critical praise: "I saw the rock and roll future and its name is Springsteen" (in a May 22, 1974 review in the alternative weekly *Real Paper*).

It was Landau's dream to work with Springsteen, and after signing on as co-producer alongside Mike Appel, he upped the stakes, ordering that the sessions be moved to the more upscale Record Plant. More importantly, he brought a critic's eye to the room. Landau didn't write the songs; he helped clarify Springsteen's vision. He urged him to be more cinematic, jumpstarting Springsteen's creativity. "He was an educated man," said Van Zandt in *Wings For Wheels*.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ "*Born To Run* is aimed right. It just doesn't go off. Though considerable attention has been paid to the arrangements, many of the tracks amount to an attempt to evolve an impression of artificial vérité as Springsteen sweats through his urban rock renewal programme."
ROY CARR, NME, SEPTEMBER 6, 1975

★ "Springsteen's base is a much more personal one, focusing heavily on one-to-one relationships. The tracks capture the burn of Springsteen, a bittersweet, unromantic assessment of people and things, and very highly attuned to the young mood of today: desperate."
RAY COLEMAN, MELODY MAKER, SEPT 13, 1975

Monmouth Arts Center, Red Bank, New Jersey, October 11, 1975

"And that was new to the neighbourhood."

Landau's analysis of the songs suggested a broad theme. The album was, he said, about the struggle to grow up, to be independent, to find out what life really means. As Springsteen put it in 'Thunder Road': *"I know you're lonely for words that I ain't spoken/But tonight we'll be free."*

The words are intoxicating and, thanks to Springsteen's careful orchestration, the music has a cinematic power which still dazzles. It sounded old when it was released in 1975; now it merely sounds timeless.

If anything, *Born To Run* took its power from the fact that it wasn't original. You could, for example, catch the flavour of Springsteen's writing in Nik Cohn's novella, *I'm Still The Greatest Says Johnny Angelo*, published in 1967. Of his motorbiking rock'n'roll hero, Cohn wrote: "And everyone was burning but Johnny most of all, he left them behind and, when he hit the crest, he flew straight off into space. 20 or 30 or 40 feet, he soared up high and everything was stretched out beneath him, everything, and his machine was exploding beneath him, and he hung there without moving, hovering like a great black bird." It's a short leap from there to Springsteen's motorvatin' prose in "Born To Run" or the *"endless juke joints and Valentine drag"* (on "Backstreets") or "Jungleland"'s climactic scene in which the streets burn *"in a real death waltz/ Between what's flesh and what's fantasy"*.

BOSSFACTS

★ **Test pressings of *Born To Run* [above left] have a sepia tint and the title printed in a handwritten-style font. A rare Springsteen collectable, copies can change hands for $1000 plus**

★ **Springsteen was uncomfortable with Columbia's decision to market him as the "future of rock" and personally went round the Hammersmith Odeon removing promotional material before the band's first London date on the *Born To Run* tour**

★ **Mike Scott of The Waterboys published an Edinburgh-based Bruce fanzine called *Jungleland***

It wasn't new, but as Lester Bangs noted in *Creem* magazine, "Springsteen's gifts lie in the way he has rethought traditional sounds and stances, coming up with a synthesis fresh enough to constitute a minor renaissance. After all, what's more old-fashioned than the avant garde?"

Greil Marcus also noted an element of recycling. "Born To Run", he wrote, was "a '57 Chevy running on melted down Crystals records."

Springsteen delivered *Born To Run* at the optimum moment. A year or two later, and it would have sounded arch. By 1977, another Cohn story was being turned into *Saturday Night Fever* – possibly the last moment when pop and pulp imagery could be elevated to the status of art without some eyebrows being raised.

Not long after that, Springsteen's style was being measured up by the Boomtown Rats for "Rat Trap". But in the autumn of 1975, Bruce Springsteen was on the covers of TIME and Newsweek. He was hailed – this time for real – as the saviour of rock'n'roll.

He had his roadmap. He would spend the rest of his life riding out to case the promised land. ✪

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

'WAIT A SECOND, YOU GUYS. ARE YOU TRYING TO KILL ME?'

As the hype machine goes into overdrive, a sceptical ANDREW TYLER jostles for space with the A-listers at the Hollywood Roxy. One person, he discovers, shares his suspicion things may be getting out of hand – Bruce Springsteen himself

TAKEN FROM
NME
NOVEMBER 15 | 1975

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE

SPRINGSTEEN SAYS HE just writes down first impressions, whereas here in Hollywood there are people in from NY who believe otherwise. They tell you things like, "Bruce is purity". Bruce cuts through grime in half the time. Bruce is what America's been praying for since Dylan fell off his motorbike, and Brando got too fat to be in the motorcade.

And it gets harder to decide what's best to believe because the people in from New York talk a lot louder than is natural and so do outsiders with a contrary understanding of the situation, coming on like a life depended on putting down the "I have seen mankind's future and it's a short, skinny guy in a brown leather jacket" theory. Bruce feels more than a little sick when he hears this kind of talk. His tendency, when it occurs, is to retire into a slow, agonised idiot drawl, the relevance of which is not all that easily recognisable. But that's to his credit. Dylan, after all, never once said, "Sure, I know the environment. The complexities of the human mind and things of that nature." And neither did James Dean or Brando when he was thin. It was only when Brando started whanging off in those kind of directions that credibility was suddenly and irrevocably reduced.

No. The only way to make a legitimate claim to American folk-hero status is to reject the candidacy as preposterous. Then clam up and spit a mysterious spit. And that's precisely what Bruce Springsteen from Freehold, NJ, is doing. Or you assume that's what he's doing.

One thing's for certain, though, and that's the fundamental lack of modesty within the Springsteen camp on the subject of the attributes and infinite potential of their boy.

Jon Landau, the celebrated American rock critic who quit worrying over an intestinal disorder to co-produce Springsteen's *Born To Run* album, says that in the "rock area" Springsteen's not only a "great artist" but also happens to be able to do "more things better than anyone else I've seen". Also he's the "best performer in the history of rock'n'roll", with the possible exception of Elvis P, whom he nominates mainly for "sentimental reasons".

Mike Appel offers scant contrast when he makes claims to being manager of "the greatest artist in the world today, that's all", a sentiment he punctuates by attacking the palm of his left hand with his right fist.

Appel is a curiosity even among rock'n'roll managers. John Hammond, the Columbia talent scout who signed Springsteen, describes him as "offensive as any man I've ever met", a reference, no doubt, to Appel's boundless and sometimes absurd urges for conflict. Mostly it's the press who get to feel Appel's pointed end and this, it turns out, is no accident.

"I like to do things with integrity," he notes, "and since the media is not set up for integrity, but for their own ends, my idea of how things should be done and their idea of how things should be done, clash. So what happens is I'm the guy they focus all their hate on."

Appel and Landau's extremities are matched by virtually everyone else within the Springsteen inner circle. Peter Philbin, Columbia's New York-based international press officer, can talk up his client with a heat approaching delirium, and at the recent Springsteen concerts at Hollywood's Roxy was not so much the impassioned go-between as one more nut on a chair howling his brains inside out.

EVEN WITHIN HIS band, there's an awestruck, almost religious regard for the man they call The Boss. Clarence Clemons, the 33-year-old saxman, sees his meeting with Springsteen as being no less than divinely wrought: "Bruce is the greatest person I've ever met," he says. "He's the strongest person I've ever met. When I first met him it was like in the Bible where this guy met this guy and he says, 'Lay down your thing and follow me' and that's exactly the way it felt, man. But I didn't. And I punish myself. And I guess God punished me 'cause I got in this car accident and nearly got killed and shit. Anyway. He came back [*from California where he'd been visiting his parents*] and we got together and here we are."

No less extraordinary has been the contribution of *Time* and *Newsweek* to the ballooning Springsteen legend and the apparent ease with which Appel was able to manipulate these two indefatigable giants.

Time had previously run a piece on Springsteen in their April 1974 issue. Then a number of weeks ago, *Newsweek* made approaches of their own and *Time*, catching wind of the freshening scent, came back for second helpings. (The renewed interest had probably been spurred on by Springsteen's dates in August at New York's Bottom Line Club, out of which came the most excessive Bruce-Is-Easily-The-Greatest-Person-On-The-Planet coverage to date.) This time, Appel explained, the rules were substantially altered. The game now was, "You give me a cover, I give you an interview."

"…And they have to dislike you for it," he says. "They say, 'we're *New Musical Express*, we're *Melody Maker*, we're *Newsweek*, we're *Time* magazine, and who the hell are you to tell us it has to be a cover story?' But I say to you, 'I'm giving you the most coveted thing I can give you. I'm giving you an interview with Bruce Springsteen. There's nothing more I can give you.'"

The indefinable two returned and the net result was that double cover splash on October 27 (Appel's birthday), the first for an entertainer since Liza Minnelli's *Cabaret* days.

Both articles were strangely impartial considering the prominence they attached to their subject. Lots of biographical data input, a smattering of the dourest kind of rhapsodising and – in *Newsweek*'s case – a few microscopic insinuations that Springsteen might, after all, be the gravest kind of record business hypola which, by the laws of media cause and effect, would render themselves and *Time* the victims.

A few years back the pair of them would have hung majestically to one side until the Springsteen legend knocked them down, then they'd have performed the gesture of the cover story.

These days even *Time* and *Newsweek* are fearful of missing out on the very next American sensation, even if it means lining up at the wrong theatre before the box office opens.

"It's crazy," says Springsteen. "It doesn't make too much sense and I don't attach too much distinction to being on the cover. It's a magazine. It goes all the way around the world but really… you know."

> "You can't come on like you're some big deal. I ain't into coming on like that because it's a basic thing that's going on. It's a rock'n'roll band and you just sing and write songs"

WE'RE IN A vacant room in the Sunset Marquis, Hollywood. Springsteen's eating a bowl of Rice Krispies. Already he's got on his brown leather jacket and he looks like he hasn't slept in maybe four weeks.

"It doesn't have that much to do with what I'm doing," he says. "I don't think so. The main reason I went through with it… you see one of the things I did want, I wanted 'Born To Run' to be a hit single. Not for the bucks but because I really believed in the song a whole lot and I just wanted to hear it on the radio, you know. On AM. Across the country. For

CONTINUES OVER »

PETER MAZEL/SUNSHINE/RETNA

BRUCE'S ROGUES GALLERY!

25 FLAMBOYANT CHARACTERS IN SPRINGSTEEN SONGS

- **Bad Scooter** *("Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out")*
- **Big Bones Billie** *("Rosalita")*
- **Big Pretty** *("Kitty's Back")*
- **Blind Terry** *("Zero And Blind Terry")*
- **Crazy Janey** *("Spirit In The Night")*
- **Early Pearly** *("Blinded By The Light")*
- **G-Man** *("Spirit In The Night")*
- **Go-Kart Mozart** *("Blinded By The Light")*
- **Hazy Davey** *("Spirit In The Night")*
- **Jack The Rabbit** *("Rosalita")*
- **Jimmy The Saint** *("Lost In The Flood")*
- **Johnny 99** *("Johnny 99")*
- **Killer Joe** *("Spirit In The Night")*
- **Little Dynamite** *("Rosalita")*
- **Little Gun** *("Rosalita")*
- **Little Spider** *("Balboa Park")*
- **Magic Rat** *("Jungleland")*
- **Missy Bimbo** *("Wild Billy's Circus Story")*
- **Outlaw Pete** *("Outlaw Pete")*
- **Sloppy Sue** *("Rosalita")*
- **Spanish Johnny** *("Incident On 57th Street")*
- **Weak Knees Willie** *("Rosalita")*
- **Wild Billy** *("Spirit In The Night", "Wild Billy's Circus Story")*
- **X-Man** *("Balboa Park")*
- **Zero** *("Zero And Blind Terry")*

me, that's where a song should be.

"And they said, well if you get your picture on *Time*, or sumpin', programme directors may think twice before they drop it or throw it out. So the only physical reason I was on that thing was for that reason specifically, you know. Otherwise man, I'll probably regret it, you know."

Rolling Stone played an altogether cooler game. Still up in the air and blowing off over their Patty Hearst exclusives, their preference was to regard Springsteen as another of those East Coast phenomena, the kind that blows in and out with the frequency of the Atlantic tide.

And *Playboy*… Appel also tried to hustle a *Playboy* cover but was told that the Big Bunny would rather take it in the eye than set that kind of precedent.

And so it was to the Roxy in Hollywood that the Springsteen entourage came October 16 to 19 to de-bunk the hype, perjury and associated theories, and it was with a deal of noise and small regard for the agreed subtleties that CBS applied themselves to the task. They began with a 50 per cent stake in the opening night house and bought in from there until your average man on the street needed air and ground troop support to get into the place.

By way of consolation, a roster of Hollywood's brightest showstoppers turned up to lend their support… a lineup that by week's end included Jack Nicholson, G. Harrison, Jackson Browne, Neil Diamond, Jackie De Shannon (backstage introduction), Carole King (backstage introduction), Joni Mitchell (left early), Cher and Gregg (twice), Tom Waits (hitched from his own gig 90 miles away), Dick Carpenter ("John, a margarita!") Wolfman Jack (?) and Warren Beatty.

First night there was the usual pre-performance walking to and fro; the conspicuous nonchalance, Hollywood hugging and shouting across the tables and explanations as to the root cause and nature of the Springsteen phenomena, and by the time Bruce actually walked out on stage, everyone was so relieved at not having to exhibit epic boredom any more that the house lit up with a screaming and a wailing that must have scared him half to death.

He heads straight for stage centre, which is dark, empty and almost eerie save for the screaming going on, leans his head and body against the mic stand and, just to further irritate those Dylan comparisons, whips out a harmonica for the opening of "Thunder Road".

He's got on a beaten-up leather jacket, a pair of tight blue Levi's. He's small, he's skinny and his harp playing's every bit as dumb as Dylan's.

"The screen door slams/Mary's dress waves/ Like a vision she dances across the porch…"

A prelude to a number about a woeful girl waiting for her King Kong to come along and make sense out of her dreaming and Springsteen as the guy who says, "What the hell, things might not be so perfect around here but let's jump in the old wagon anyway and take a ride along Thunder Road."

"Hey I know it's late we can make it if we run…"

There's just a piano pumping away and Springsteen's knotty, out-of-tune voice… and dead still. Head bowed. Brando, in *The Men*, as his girl's telling him she'll love him forever even though his legs don't work any more. Actually, it's all pretty embarrassing. And with folk through the house going "Whoop, yeah… you sure can make a guitar sing, Bruce," you feel kind of ominously out of sync.

Then the band comes out for the "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out", also from *Born To Run*, and the lights flash on and Springsteen starts whipping and winding up his body, attempting to lend the appearance of weight to what on record is a fairly inconsequential moment. Cluttered, dense lyrics. A melody and arrangement that are a patchwork of some of the more dubious R'n'R mannerisms of the '60s.

"Spirit In The Night" is one of his few genuinely stirring melodies, even though it leans too heavily on Van Morrison. An early song from *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ*, a period when Springsteen was caught up with the flash of the exploding metaphor… gypsy angels, mission men and a preponderance of internal rhyme and lines that get left hanging.

Crazy Janey, Wild Billy and a bunch more drive out to Greasy Lake *"about a mile down on the dark side of route 88"*, where Janey's fingers wind up in the author's *"cake"*. The love scene is played out in the dark with Springsteen lying prone across a line of tables that reach out to the stage. Girls rub his back as he sings *"Me and crazy Janey was making love in the dirt singing our birthday songs"*. Then the band and the spots light up, Springsteen jogs back to the stage and the house goes wild with delight (for Janey and her lover that night).

For the opening of the old Manfred Mann number, "Pretty Flamingo", Springsteen delivers a rambling explanation-as-to-the-origins monologue that's half-heard, half-grunt and a pretty fine enactment of barhouse literacy. The kind of punchy drool that Dean gloried in.

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BOSSFACTS

Springsteen bought a 1960 Corvette with his first royalty cheque from *Born To Run*. It's now in the Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame's "From Asbury Park To The Promised Land" Bruce exhibition, as is the first car he ever owned, a customised 1957 Chevrolet Bel Air convertible

> "I'm always 10 points down because not only have you got to play but you got to blow this bullshit out of people's minds first…"

TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE

Everyone gets to feel mean in the presence of this kind of talk.

More sordid still is the way he frames the opening to "E Street Shuffle". Here he tells the largely factual account of how he met up with saxman Clemons, who'd been playing with a local Asbury Park R'n'B band when a girlfriend told him he'd best go down to the Student Prince and look in on this kid Springsteen.

The way Springsteen tells it, he and his guitarist Miami Steve were shuffling through the cold and foggy night when they see a big man coming at them. They hide in a doorway and fall to their knees as the big man approaches.

They're scared and they're cold and they're getting ready to run when Clarence holds out a hand, Springsteen reaches out to meet it. They touch. And sparks fly out on E Street.

The magic of Springsteen is right here… at the climax of this particular yarn. On the word "sparks", the stage flashes red, Springsteen leaps to a standstill and the band lams in with the kind of precision entrance that occurs only when there's an operating consensus. From now, the show's alive, more refined… a state of affairs that very nearly extends to the music itself.

"Kitty's Back", "Jungleland" and "Rosalita" have that foggy West Side tilt to them and although none is a miracle of construction there's enough ongoing momentum – and in the case of "Kitty's Back" a climactic instrumental segment – to eclipse the dubious areas.

The band, in fact, is surprisingly adept at locating Springsteen's half-concealed intentions. Excellent solos are forthcoming in both "Rosalita" and "Kitty's Back"… especially from pianist Roy Bitten… and only organist Danny Federici, whose tendency is to grip the high end of the board a lot longer than is attractive, is suspect here.

Just one encore tonight… a high drama mood piece with accordion and sometimes whispered lyrics.

"Sandy" is about Bruce, or someone a lot like Bruce, readying himself to quit the boardwalk life, and it gives Springsteen the chance to open up on the reckless inhabitants of that whole scene. The clairvoyants, the bikers, waitresses, someone called Madame Marie, each of them shuffling back and forth from nothing to not much more.

Lyrically it's one of his most interesting pieces, since it's one of the few moments he chooses to lay bare the disillusionment he patently feels for all the shucking from pintable to roadside manner to trash can which, in most of his later works, he's inadvertently glorifying.

Born To Run, he says, "was about New York. I was there for months. I had this girl with me and she'd just come in from Texas and she wanted to go home again and she was going nuts and we were in this room and it just went on and on. I would come home and she would say, 'Are you done? Is it over? Are you finished?' And I said, 'No it ain't over, it ain't over.' I'd come home practically in tears.

"And I was sort of into that whole thing of being nowhere. But knowing that there is something someplace. It's got to be right somewhere."

TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE

"I used to feel I was always in control. But now I'm not so sure"

BORN TO RUN had already been eight months in the making when Jon Landau (prev. exp. MC5's *Back In The USA* plus two Livingston Taylor albums) moved in on the job. With Landau around, things continued to move at a deathly doze, although the further four and half months taken to complete the package was, by contrast, an exhibition of fire and lightning.

Landau attributes the delays to Springsteen's fetish for detail: "He'd spend four hours," he said, "on one line. He'd say, 'Hang on guys, I wanna check a line' and four hours later he'd be sitting there trying to make the most minute changes in one verse."

The pair had met in April '74 in a Boston club called Charlie's where the Springsteen band were playing. In the club window was a blow-up of a review Landau had just written for the local *Real Paper,* an A-minus piece that dealt with Springsteen's "many imperfections" as well as a considerable potential for world domination.

It was a cold night, Landau remembers, and he found Springsteen in the back garden in a T-shirt, jumping up and down as he read the review. Springsteen told him he'd read better but the piece was okay, and then Landau introduced himself.

The show he saw that night he describes as "astounding", although no more than a "rough draft" of what takes place these days. The pair kept in touch and a month later Landau went into print with that high-voltage review that Columbia subsequently spent $50,000 promoting… the "I have seen rock'n'roll's future and its name is Bruce Springsteen" job.

Not that CBS didn't require an amount of cattle prodding before lining up behind the Springsteen/Landau combination. Factionalism within the company was rife… due partly to the flamboyance of Appel and the intractable nature of his client and also because Springsteen was a prodigy of "disgraced" chief executive Clive Davis.

There were even reports of an alleged plot where the Springsteen myth would be hatched solely to irritate Bob Dylan, who'd recently left CBS for a two-record deal with David Geffen's Asylum company.

Appel himself goes more than halfway to conceding that such a plan might well have existed.

"When you're involved in big-time record company management," he says, "there are powerplays. There's how do you bring Bob Dylan into line, how do you bring his lawyers into line?

"His lawyer comes in and asks for the world… asks for retroactive royalties on Bob Dylan's albums. Asking outrageous sums of money. All kinds of deals. All kinds of big spending. And then when the negotiations fail, Clive Davis had left the record company and the whole world was looking at Columbia Records and everyone was taking potshots at them. They were very nervous. Very uptight at this particular time, trying to prove themselves. Naturally they might have said, you know, in the heat of the moment, 'screw Bob Dylan, we're going to take Bruce Springsteen and use him and show that

guy just where it's at'. However, that wasn't to be the case because it took us a long time to get our album together and *Blood On The Tracks* and all that had come out ahead of us. And they did manage to get Bob back."

A suitably ironic climax to this particular episode was the request made through CBS by *Time* magazine for an interview with Bob Dylan on the subject of Bruce Springsteen. The request was rejected.

SPRINGSTEEN IS BEWILDERED rather than flattered by the machinations on his behalf…the hoops he has to go through for the front pages.

"They made the mistake," he says, "they came out with the big hype. I mean how can they expect people to swallow something like that? [*CBS's early ads comparing him with Dylan*]. And it blows my mind how they can underestimate people so much. All the time, man, it's like… trying to find some room, man. Gimme some damn room. Give me a break, I was trying to tell these guys at the record company, 'Wait a second, you guys. Are you trying to kill me?' It was like a suicide attempt on their part. It was like somebody didn't want to make no money.

"I was in this big shadow, man, right from the start… and I'm just getting over this Dylan thing: 'Oh thank God that seems to be fading away' and I'm sitting home thinking, 'Thank God people seem to be letting that lie' and phwoooooee 'I have seen…' No, it can't be.

"So immediately I call up the company and I say, 'get that quote out'. And it was like, Landau's article. And it was a really nice piece and it meant a lot to me, but it was like they took it all out of context and blew it up and who's gonna swallow that? Who's gonna believe that? It's going to piss people off, man. It pisses me off. When I read it I wanted to strangle the guy who put that thing in there. It's like you want to kill these guys for doin' stuff like that.

"They sneak it in on you. They sneak it in and they don't tell you nuthin'. It's like 'shotgun murderer chops off eight arms.' It's that kind of tactic, you know, It's that kind of tactic and they pull it for themselves and they pull it for me, too…

"It's a stupid thing. Ignore it, you know. Ignore the whole thing because it don't make any sense. So like I'm always 10 points down because not only have you got to play, but you got to blow this bullshit out of people's minds first."

Says Jackie De Shannon over a cup of morning coffee: "It was beautiful, I felt James Dean was back… When I saw James Dean for the first time I fell on the floor. When I saw Bob Dylan for the first time I fell on the floor. When I saw Bruce Springsteen for the first time I fell on the floor…"

"Nah, it's like… if anything, you know. All I do, like, I write down my impressions of stuff, like, and what I see, you know. It's like… but if you're looking for something to look to… if you're into the band it's like… I don't know. I can't really see myself like that."

Appel has a more adroit interpretation of the hype-versus-legitimacy dialetic and it goes like this: "I just say to myself, 'Listen fellows (of the press), your vanities may have been up, your ego might have been up, but let's stop the bullshit. The kid's really good. He's really different. If you've got any kind of talent you'll recognise him. If you don't you'll be run over. It's like a steamroller. We'll win in the end. You've got no chance against us, you've got no chance because we're right. We're good?'"

Appel used to write commercial jingles. He was also in the Marine reserves and if he comes on a little like Ed Sullivan meets Joseph Goebbels that's roughly the way Springsteen sees it too.

"It's like you can't lay an attitude on people. It's like bullshit, It's like a jive thing. You can't come on like you're some big deal, you know. I ain't into coming on like that because it's a basic thing that's going on. It's a simple thing. It's a band, you know. It's a rock and roll band and you just sing and write songs."

Appel got to meet Springsteen through an early mutual accomplice called Tinker. Tinker started out building drag racers in California, moved to Nassau where he helped launch astronauts into space and wound up in New Jersey. Springsteen met him in a bar. He was 18 years old and Tinker said he could get him a job as a guitar player with Janis Joplin's band.

"I ended up living with him in a surfboard factory for a year and a half. It was dynamite up there."

The first time Springsteen stepped outside the Jersey state line was with Tinker. Everyone in the band saved up a hundred dollars and drove out to California in a station wagon and a Chevy truck. Springsteen flipped from coast to coast during the next four years before realising the best band he could ever have was waiting for him in NJ.

In 1970 or '71 – he doesn't remember – Tinker took him to New York to meet with Appel, and just like in a B-movie plot, Appel is knocked out by the curly-haired kid with the wooden guitar, and within months has him eyeballing with the big record company talent scout.

Springsteen at the time is reading Anthony Scaduto's book on Dylan and is fired up over the scene where Dylan launches himself into John Hammond's office, plays a couple of tunes and gets signed in a big hurry. So Springsteen and Appel try their hand and it works a second time.

And that brings us through two low-impact albums followed by a regeneration of Columbia's corporate faith back to the Roxy in Hollywood where, by week's end, Springsteen is being exalted to a degree that puts you in the mind of Appel's steamroller doctrine. By now even Walter Yetnikoff, president of the Columbia Records group, is up on his chair, stirred, possibly, by the avalanche of dollars that is mounting in his imagination.

BOSSFACTS

Springsteen sent a demo of his song "Fire" to Elvis Presley just weeks before he died. Robert Gordon ultimately recorded the first version, although it was The Pointer Sisters' cover that reached No 2 in the US charts

2005 fiction anthology *Meeting Across The River* comprised 20 short stories by different writers based entirely on the song from *Born To Run*

The kids too – and by now it's the punter class – have taken on a demeanour that bears more than a passing resemblance to the early Beatle years, except these kids are older and so is Springsteen (26).

But the years are no insulation against the Springsteen wall of faith as codified by Appel, Landau and Philbin and expressed, if haltingly by now, by Brucesteen himself.

Time and *Newsweek* believed, and the punters believe because anything can be believed that is supported by the indomitable will of unyielding faith as manifest by the aforementioned.

Springsteen could eat a camel whole, so long as he believed such a project wasn't outside his range, so long as the camel believed and the camel trader believed… or a king's new clothes situation where no-one notices the king's fat, naked legs until a kid says, "Hey, where's his trousers" and all that faith drains away in a second and a half.

Given that sooner or later someone's going to speak up, the deciding factor remains whether or not Springsteen actually has anything to cover his legs… that something being artistic substance and I'll offer the opinion that Springsteen is indeed naked. That he's no more than a frontman for another good rock'n'roll band, composer of R'n'B-slanted material that tips a little in advance of the mean average. The supposed profoundly cerebral inclinations are also misleading because Springsteen has neither the originality or the intentions – political or otherwise – of a Dylan, which leaves him with a sackful of punk, loner mannerisms that he's already tiring of… a situation that probably caused the making of *Born To Run* to be such a vexed and anxious 12-and-a-half months.

Springsteen has a will and a strong dramatic style and the air of the all-American loner who the guys in the gang ask of, "Where ya goin', Brucie?" and Springsteen grunts and goes off to the pier to meet his girl whom he loves with a loyal and refined urgency as opposed to, say, Jagger, who could wake up any place and not remember how.

And he exudes that dumb animal wisdom that made Brando and Dean such attractive propositions way back, even though Springsteen tries to upset the image with literary pretentions.

Appel, Landau and Philbin think they have to protect and talk up their man otherwise he dies, whereas Springsteen will be either musically wiped out, or more likely, become another averagely regarded also-ran shouldering the resentment of punters and business types who by now see themselves as being suckered and duped.

"I used to feel I always was in control," says Springsteen, "But now I'm not so sure." ✪

DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN

Into the Badlands. A trip into a grimmer and more realistic America, where the way out is a lot harder to find. BY BUD SCOPPA

★ 2 JUNE 1978

FOLLOWING *BORN To Run* was like following the Empire State Building. How do you stop yourself making an inferior copy? How do you avoid being paralysed by the pressure to top it? If you're Bruce Springsteen, the answer was simple: you just keep on keepin' on.

"I was both elated and embarrassed by my good fortune," Springsteen told Elvis Costello in a January conversation on the latter's terrific talk show, *Spectacle*. "In the end, my music was always about identity, identity, identity: Who am I? Where do I belong? What's the code I'm trying to live by? And so, *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* was really inspired by, 'All right, I had that first type of success, but what does that make me now?'"

The process of answering those questions, however, would have to be put off while Springsteen dealt with a nagging problem. He'd been ripped off, and what's more, the person who'd done it was blocking him from making his next record. In July of 1976, nine months after the release of *Born To Run*, Bruce filed a suit against his ex-manager Mike Appel, to get back the rights to his own songs; the rights he had naively signed away years earlier on the hood of a car in a New Jersey parking lot, without even reading the contract. Two days later, Appel filed a countersuit in an attempt to block Springsteen from recording with his present manager and co-producer, Jon Landau. It took 11 months of wrangling – and a huge pile of cash – for Bruce to get his songs back in an out-of-court settlement. Only then was he free to move on.

The following June, Springsteen and the E Street Band entered the studio with Landau and engineer Jimmy Iovine to begin the sessions for what would become *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*. They didn't emerge until a year later, after recording and re-recording not only the 10 songs that would appear on the album, but a bunch more as well. Some of these unused songs would find their way to grateful artists including Patti Smith ("Because The Night"), Robert Gordon ("Fire"),

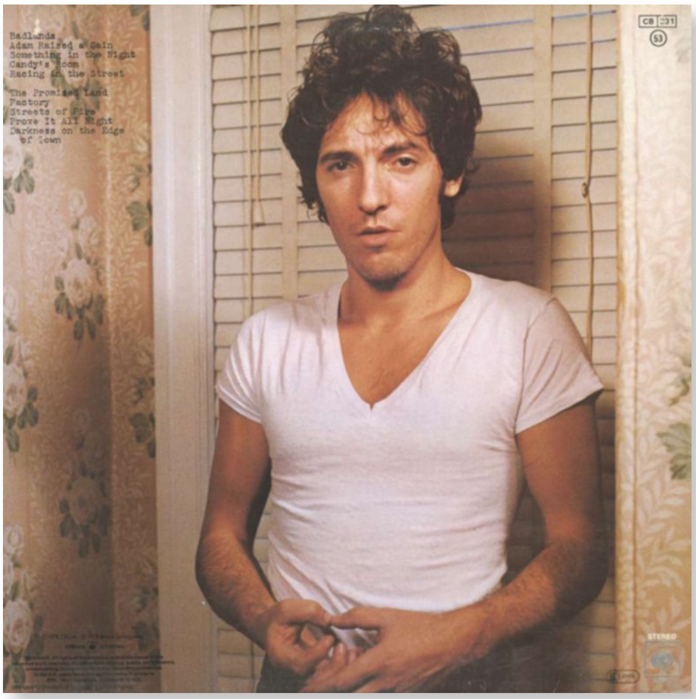
CONTINUES OVER »

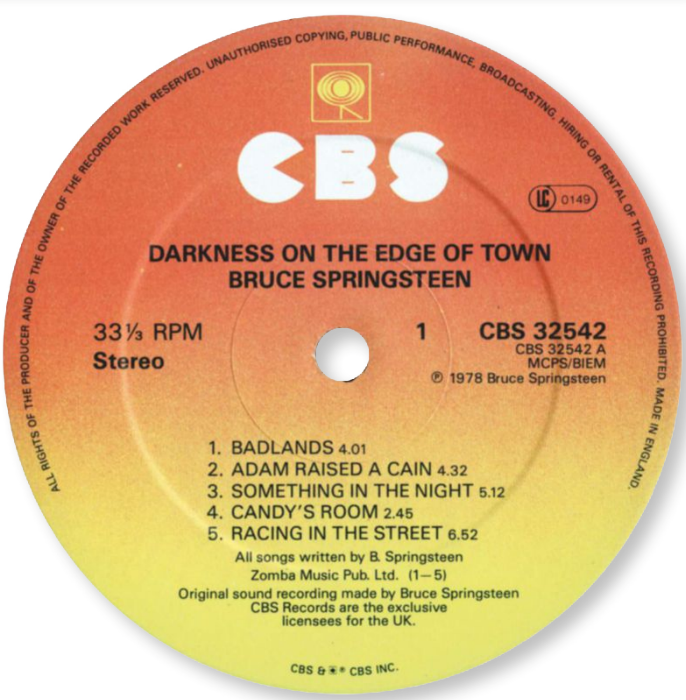
TRACKMARKS

1. Badlands ★★★★
2. Adam Raised A Cain ★★★★
3. Something In The Night ★★★★
4. Candy's Room ★★★★★
5. Racing In The Street ★★★★★
6. The Promised Land ★★★★
7. Factory ★★
8. Streets Of Fire ★★★★
9. Prove It All Night ★★★★★
10. Darkness On The Edge Of Town ★★★★

Released: June 2, 1978
Produced by: Jon Landau and Bruce Springsteen
Production assistance: Steve Van Zandt
Recorded in: New York
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen; Clarence Clemons (sax and percussion); Danny Federici (organ); Roy Bittan (piano); Garry Tallent (bass); Steve Van Zandt (guitar); Max Weinberg (drums)
Highest chart position: UK 16; US 5

Bruce
Springsteen
Darkness
on the Edge
of Town


Badlands
Adam Raised a Cain
Something in the Night
Candy's Room
Racing in the Street
The Promised Land
Factory
Streets of Fire
Prove It All Night
Darkness on the Edge
of Town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CBS
LC 0149
DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
33⅓ RPM
Stereo
1
CBS 32542
CBS 32542 A
MCPS/BIEM
℗ 1978 Bruce Springsteen
1. BADLANDS 4.01
2. ADAM RAISED A CAIN 4.32
3. SOMETHING IN THE NIGHT 5.12
4. CANDY'S ROOM 2.45
5. RACING IN THE STREET 6.52
All songs written by B. Springsteen
Zomba Music Pub. Ltd. (1—5)
Original sound recording made by Bruce Springsteen
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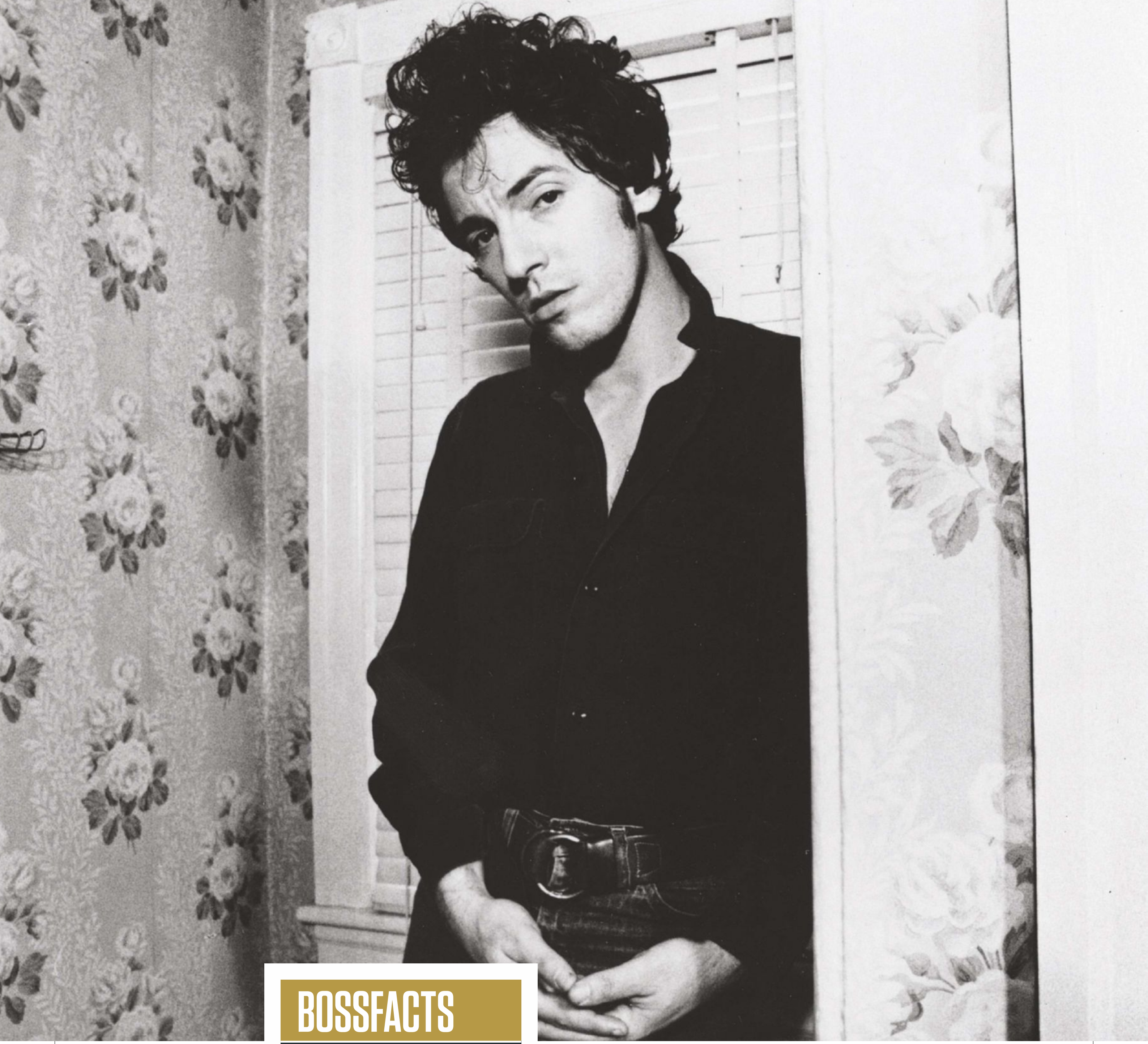


MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Southside Johnny ("Hearts Of Stone"), Greg Kihn ("Rendezvous"), Gary US Bonds ("This Little Girl") and even The Knack ("Don't Look Back").

The songs that did make the final cut were very much of a piece. Springsteen persisted with the narrative mode he'd broken out on "Rosalita" and "Kitty's Back" from *The Wild, The Innocent And The E Street Shuffle* and feasted on with the songs of *Born To Run*. But this time he shifted his setting from the mythopoetic America of the earlier records to what felt distinctly like the world Americans were actually living in. And that real world was a dreary one indeed. Rolling down the window and letting the wind blow back your hair was far less exhilarating when you were driving a delivery truck around Monmouth County, or heading to the Ford factory in Metuchen for another interminable shift on the assembly line. This was a world from which there was no escape along the lines of "Born To Run" and "Thunder Road". On *Darkness...*, Springsteen's characters were trapped, as he made clear in the opening lines of the opening song, "Badlands": *"Lights out tonight, trouble in the heartland/Got a head-on collision smashin' in my guts, man/I'm caught in a crossfire that I don't understand."*

The social and political climate in America then was much like it is today, as the giddiness of a changing of the guard from the Nixon era to the election of Democratic President Jimmy Carter gave way to the bitter realisation that things weren't getting better. People were struggling mightily, trying to make ends meet, losing their jobs, seeing little reason for optimism in the brutal, unforgiving world around them – a world that was always threatening to swallow them up.

Springsteen may have been a rock star, but he hadn't cut ties with the blue-collar world from which he'd emerged. "I guess it just started after *Born To Run*," he told biographer Dave Marsh in 1981. "I had all that time off, and I spent a lotta time home. We were off for three years, and home for a long time. It came out of a local kind of thing – what my old friends were doing, what my relatives were doing. How things were affecting them, and what their lives were like. And what my life was like."

While Springsteen was writing and recording

BOSSFACTS

★ Following just four European dates for *Born To Run* in November 1975, Springsteen did not tour *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* in Europe at all – and did not return to the continent until April 1981

★ The cover portrait was shot at the Haddonfield, NJ, home of photographer Frank Stefanko

★ *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* was NME's album of the year for 1978, ahead of The Jam's *All Mod Cons*, *This Year's Model* by Elvis Costello, Talking Heads' *More Songs About Buildings & Food* and *Africa Stand Alone* by Culture

these songs, punk happened, aligning him with the old guard in the eyes of many. Thematically, though, *Darkness…* could have been a punk record, even if it addressed blue-collar concerns with resignation rather than rage. In the conversation with Costello, Springsteen confirmed that he'd been listening closely to British punk, noting that *Darkness…* was meant to be "a different kind of record – that was the idea. It was written to be tougher. And there was influence from the punk scene, and your [*Costello's*] stuff. There was a lot of tough music that came out of England in those years – those early Buzzcocks records, and the Clash singles – that stuff found its way into the subtext of *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, along with sort of a cinematic-ness that was just part of growin' up on all the westerns… And also, wanting it to be about something – that was important to me. I said, 'Well, y'know, the people that I liked, they gathered their times in, and found a way to contextualise it in a language to speak about the events of the day. That's what I want to do, if I can do it."

Indeed, the American artists with whom Bruce was most closely aligned in terms of subject matter were working in film, not music. The gritty romanticism of Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky* (1976) shares more than a little with the *mise-en-scène* of the record, which associates losers with a hard-earned nobility. Then there's Monte Hellman's 1971 cult classic, *Two Lane Blacktop*, which inspired "Racing In The Street", and Terrence Malick's 1973 movie, *Badlands*, whose title Springsteen borrowed. The parallel with film extended to the narrative itself. *Darkness…* is not so much one character's story as it is an Altman-esque ensemble piece – a *Small Change* populated by working stiffs and three-time losers.

"I wanted to move into adult issues," Springsteen continued. "I've always believed the greatest rock'n'roll musicians are desperate men. You've got to have something that's bothering you all the time. In art and in love, one and one makes three. In music, painting or any art form, if one and one makes two, you've failed. You've got to find that third thing that you don't completely understand, but that is truly comin' up from inside of you… If you don't reach down and touch that thing, you're just not gonna have anything to say, and it's not gonna feel like it has life and breath in it. You're not gonna create something real, and it's not gonna feel authentic. So, I worked hard on those things."

Clearly, a lot of work was necessary to keep the songs from sagging under the weight of their misery. Some of that came from the engineer, Jimmy Iovine, who teased a dense, pile-driving sound out of the E Street Band on *Darkness…*, the like of which he'd explore further with Tom Petty & The Heartbreakers on *Damn The Torpedoes*. The cerebral Landau, meanwhile, surely helped organise the calibrated symmetry and balance of *Darkness…* The record is set up like the '69 Chevy muscle car in "Racing In The Street". "Badlands" and "Promised Land", the four-square midtempo rockers that open each side, function as the high-performance tyres on the front end. The side-closing "Racing…" and "Darkness On The Edge Of Town" are the heavy-duty grabbers in the rear, capable of handling heavy emotional loads. The remaining six tracks comprise the power plant and transmission, as Bruce sits in the driver's seat, one hand on the steering wheel, the other on the Hurst shifter, his feet dancing over the pedals, working it.

When the record finally arrived, in June '78, it was greeted with something less than jubilation. *ZigZag*'s John Tobler opened his pan dismissively: "I don't see any point in using any artist's business mistakes as some kind of excuse for what may be lacking in his comeback album, so I refuse to allow any sentiment (of which I had little anyway) to colour my judgment away from feeling that this album is pretty ordinary." Peter Silverton concluded his mixed review in *Sounds* with the observation that Springsteen "sounds a frightened man, awed by his own history." In *Creem*, Mitchell Cohen fretted that too often on *Darkness…*, "the songs sound mannered, overly solipsistic, and so serious. Doesn't this guy ever get in the car just to go get a pack of cigarettes? It's a major production every time he turns the ignition key." Three years later, Springsteen aligned himself with the reviewers. "On *Darkness…*, I like the ideas; I'm not crazy about the performances," he told Marsh. "We play all those songs 10 times better live."

Ironically, the most musically captivating song on *Darkness…* was its least typical. "Candy's Room", the album's lone foray into all-out passion and splendour, posits hot sex as an escape from this woebegone world – blessed relief if not ultimate redemption – and the band jumps on the premise with unmitigated passion. Max Weinberg's sizzling cymbals set the lusty mood, and Bruce plays against it in the opening, speaking rather than singing the first lines in a muted, contained vocal that then proceeds to build toward an operatic intensity (*à la* Roy Orbison) from section to section, supported by Weinberg's pummeling snare and thundering kick, and ornamented by Roy Bittan's shimmering piano notes. An abrupt pause mid-song provides an opening for Bruce to step forward and unleash a lascivious guitar solo, taking the track to a delirious moment of anticipation before the band returns to finish the job, and as the sounds recede, the guitar ends it with a sigh of satisfaction. A moment later, Bittan's sombre piano chords (echoing his work on Jackson Browne's Landau-produced 1976 album, *The Pretender*) introduce "Racing In The Streets", a sequel to "Thunder Road", but stripped of all romance, the track's slogging pace suggesting the morning after, with a hangover to boot.

Imagine how different the album would have felt had it culminated with "Candy's Room" into "Prove It All Night"; that sort of slam-bang finish would have made a far different impression. But if the unremittingly dark tone of *Darkness…* – "Candy's Room" excepted – threw off many of Bruce's fans, its monochromatic severity was ultimately the album's greatest distinction. "When I did *Darkness…*, I was very focused on one particular idea, one particular feeling that I wanted to do," Springsteen explained to Dave DiMartino in 1981. "So this time, one of the things that I felt was that on *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, I just didn't make room for certain things, ya know? Because I couldn't understand how you could feel so good and so bad at the same time. And it was very confusing for me. 'Sherry Darling' was gonna be on *Darkness…*, 'Independence Day' was a song that was gonna be on *Darkness…*, and the song that I wrote right after 'Darkness…' was 'Point Blank' – which takes that thing to its furthest."

He might also have mentioned "Because The Night", which surely would've been at least as big a hit for him as it was for Patti Smith had he chosen to cut it for *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*. But, no, on this record, Bruce was going after one thing and one thing only. It isn't hard to imagine the album as a sprawling double balancing these emotional extremes. But that would have to wait until the next go-round. ✪

Thematically, *Darkness*... could have been a punk record, even if it addressed blue-collar concerns with resignation rather than rage

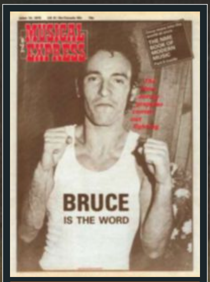
THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ **"Walks a fine line between the outrageous claims made on Springsteen's behalf and his tendency towards a grandiose, epic feel that encouraged those claims in the first place."**
PAUL RAMBALI, NME, JUNE 10, 1978

★ **"He never lets himself nor the band off the leash, with every song mid-paced or slower, his every guitar-solo terse, and Clarence Clemons' sax only looking twice. This should bring him the success he deserves, and I hope that'll allow him to relax a bit instead of forcing himself onwards."**
CHRIS BRAZIER, MELODY MAKER, JUNE 10, 1978

'MY MUSIC GAVE ME EVERYTHING. I WAS NOBODY, I HAD NOTHING...'

In New York, TONY PARSONS witnesses "the greatest rock'n'roll show I will ever experience", then is summoned backstage for a head-to-head with "the most likeable geezer I've met in my life". On the agenda: *Darkness...*, responsibility, business and how to get thrown out of Madison Square Garden...



TAKEN FROM
NME
OCTOBER 14 | 1978

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS

"*Darkness*… is about people refusing to let go of their humanity. No matter what they go through. No matter what life does to them"

GREETINGS from the New Jersey shoreline's omnipresent leisure industry of endless beaches, boardwalks, amusement parks, souvenir arcades, piers, clubs, pubs, bars and sideshow booths… greetings from smalltown life in Asbury Park, New Jersey.

Our story begins in the early '60s. At a strict Catholic school, a strange, solitary boy of 11 has been caught skipping lessons. His punishment is being placed in a class of six- year-olds. His arms and legs feel too long for his body as he sits at the dinky table and chair built for a mere mite. Stared at by the room full of curious Catholic ankle-biters – immobile Lilliputians to his awkward, embarrassed Gulliver – he grins self-consciously, his face burning.

The Sister Of Mercy's voice breaks the silence. "Let's show this young man," she intones, her eyes never leaving the boy, "what we do to children who smile in this class."

One of the six-year-olds stands up and walks over to where the big kid is sitting. Their eyes are level. Then the small child pulls back his fist and, with all the force he can muster from the spirit of the Holy Mother Mary, rams it home into the older boy's face.

"Very good," smiles the Sister.

Stunned with shock, shame and pain, the boy clutches his face, fighting back the tears.

"There's a dark cloud rising from the desert floor/I packed my bags and I'm heading straight into the storm/Gonna be a twister to blow everything down/That ain't got the faith to stand its ground/Blow away the dreams that tear you apart/Blow away the dreams that break your heart/Blow away the lies that leave you nothing but lost and broken hearted/The dogs on mainstreet howl 'cause they understand/If I could take one moment into my hands/Mister, I ain't a boy/No, I'm a man/And I believe in a Promised Land."

SOME 17 YEARS later he's slumped in the dressing room at New York City's Palladium. After his usual three-hour soundcheck that afternoon, where he personally covered every last inch of the 3,400 seater theatre to make sure that the sound was absolutely perfect for every kid in the house, he performed the greatest rock'n'roll show that I will ever experience. It lasted for nearly four hours. It will be almost dawn before he finally leaves the Palladium.

Out back there's several hundred kids waiting for autographs, a chance to talk to him, an opportunity to thank him. None of them will go home disappointed. He's got time for all of them and he doesn't make a big deal about it. If you press him on the subject, he'll just get thoughtful and reply, "My music gave me everything that I got, I was nobody, I had nothing… I will never put anyone in the position of being humiliated. It happened to me for too long."

And if any other musician in the world said that to me – as you've no doubt noticed – I'd wait until I stopped laughing and then it would be news-sheet mincemeat time. But this geezer is unique; when Bruce Springsteen comes out with emotive statements like that I don't sneer, I BELIEVE.

When Springsteen played New Orleans on his last American tour a middle-aged woman reached up from the stalls and handed him a ring, saying that it had been her grandmother's engagement ring. There was a plethora of precious stones encrusted on the ring and it was obviously worth thousands of dollars. Springsteen thanked her for the thought, but said he couldn't take it. The woman refused to take it back, told him that she wanted him to keep it and disappeared back into the darkness of the auditorium. Shaken, Springsteen handed the ring to the hall's management after the show and told them to keep it safe in case the woman ever came back to claim it.

She never did.

"It gives you a feeling of responsibility, a real heavy feeling of responsibility," Springsteen reflects. "I had all these kids coming up to me all the time we were making the album and they'd say, 'We know it's gonna be great, we know you're gonna do it, it's gonna be great!'… I don't wanna let the people that have supported me down. And it ain't good enough just getting by, I wanna take it all the way, every night…"

There ain't nothing else that he can do.

All duded up for Sunday night, the last of three Springsteen dates at the Palladium (all 10,000-plus seats sold in under two hours) this is a partisan crowd, hardcore Springsteen followers since the early days. They're mostly in their late teens or early twenties; wild and loud but without the glass-chucking violence so beloved by the mob-handed morons with a mile-wide yellow streak down their backs who contaminate gigs back in the good ol' Yew Kay.

"These kids that come to my shows, they ain't there for trouble, they're here to have a good time," Springsteen tells me. "They get kinda noisy and excited, but the last thing on their mind is busting somebody's skull."

Before every show he plays, Springsteen talks to the security and tells them that he doesn't want any rough stuff. He tells them that if there is any heavy-handed bouncer antics he'll do everything in his power to make sure the individuals responsible are looking for a new job in the morning.

What he doesn't tell them is that if they start beating up on the kids then they better be prepared to go through him, too; he personally dives into the audience to sort out security-provoked aggravation. It happened time and time again on his last tour.

"You guys work here?" he demands. "These guys you're roughing up are my friends!" And his fans love him for it…

"But the security at the Palladium are okay," Springsteen grins. "Never any trouble here. They know me."

About half of the crowd are from New Jersey and a lot of them remember him jamming in the Upstage club, which he remembers as "some of the happiest nights of my life".

"If there was ever a chance of any of us making a living through music, we figured it would be through Bruce," says his guitarist Miami Steve Van Zandt of the E Street Band.

SPRINGSTEEN HAD FIRST picked up a guitar (for mirror-posing purposes) at nine, the day after gawking at Elvis on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, but he didn't start playing until he was a friendless 13-year-old, two years after the nun's rough justice in the Catholic classroom. His distaste for organised religion ("The smell of the convent made me literally throw up"), his lack of self-respect ("I definitely did not dig myself") and his loneliness ("It was a very solitary existence, I didn't have the flair to be the class clown, it was like I just didn't exist") left a life of such awesome nothingness that he was soon practising eight hours a day to fill it.

"My youngest sister, she's 16 and she's very pretty and very popular. There's no way she's gonna sit in her room every waking hour." He grins ruefully. "I didn't have that problem."

By the time he was 14 he was in his first band, by 16 he was so good that when he practised in a garage, kids would stand on milk crates with their noses pressed against the windowpanes to watch him.

At first none of the countless bars and clubs in New Jersey would allow him on their stage because he refused to play Top 40 golden greats. Then he was given a chance to strut his stuff at the Upstage and struck while his plectrum was hot. From then on he packed out the club for four nights a week until he finally met his first manager, Mike Appel. They decided to be Elvis and Colonel Tom but it really didn't happen that way at all.

After the CBS contract in the early '70s came *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* and *The Wild, The* »

BOSSFACTS

In addition to "The Promised Land" itself, the phrase appears in the lyrics to eight other Springsteen songs: "Thunder Road", "Racing In The Street", "The Price You Pay", "Johnny Bye-Bye", "Goin' Cali", "The Ghost Of Tom Joad", "Galveston Bay" and "From Small Things (Big Things One Day Come)"

Unhappy with his picture on the cover of 1978's *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, Springsteen has admitted to spray-painting over the image on a giant Los Angeles billboard ad for the album

Meet the new Boss: *NME*'s Tony Parsons with Bruce, 1978

JOE STEVENS

Bargain
20 OZ. CUP OF REFRESHING
Coca-Cola
FRIED CHICKEN
43¢
43¢

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS

Innocent And The E Street Shuffle, both in 1973, with only a handful of songs – "Lost In The Flood", "Spirit In The Night", "Incident On 57th Street", "Sandy", "Rosalita" – giving a clue to the quality to come, the rest of the records too verbose for comfort, Springsteen subsequently getting lumbered with one of the New Dylan albatrosses that in those days they were giving away instead of Green Shield stamps.

Springsteen went into the studio for a year or so to record his third album, co-producing it with Appel and *Rolling Stone* scribe Jon Landau, and when he came out again the shit was already poised to splatter against the proverbial fan, man. *Born To Run* was grandiose, heroic, magical, worthy of some unholy alliance between Phil Spector and Leonard Bernstein, a romantic fantasy of sleazy streetlife, enormously accessible.

As the hysterical hyperbole of the CBS publicity machine went into overdrive, Springsteen played 10 sold-out dates at New York's Bottom Line to consistently ecstatic audiences, *Born To Run* became a platinum album and the single of the same name broke into the American Top 20. Top of the world, Ma! Then everything began to fall to pieces...

Jon Landau had written an incisive, sensitive, trenchantly subjective article on Springsteen for *Rolling Stone* [*actually Boston's* The Real Paper, *22 May 1974*] in which he succeeded in expressing the unique brilliance of the man in intensely personal terms; Landau spoke of his love for his girlfriend asleep upstairs as he worked at his typewriter, of what the music he had grown up with had meant to his life and how witnessing Springsteen that night had been the purest exposition of the rock'n'roll spirit that he had seen in many years. Landau's piece remains one of the best articles on Springsteen.

But CBS instigated an all-out critical backlash by latching on to one quote from the article – "I have seen the future of rock'n'roll and its name is Bruce Springsteen" – taking it completely out of context and using it as the masthead for the hard-sell marketing technique overkill that rebounded on the record company and Bruce himself with a vengeance. "At Last London Is Ready For Bruce Springsteen!" was another one, and I remember sneering at it as I walked down City Road, N1, on my way to work one night in 1975.

In fairness to Springsteen, no-one was innocent when it came to the extravagant claims being made on his behalf except for Bruce Springsteen himself. As soon as he saw the "FUTURE OF " quote screaming from a *Born To Run* advertising billboard he was on the blower to the Fat Cats telling them to cut CONTINUES OVER »

COVER ME:
THE BEST OF THE BOSS BY OTHERS

"Atlantic City" – *The Hold Steady*
"Blinded By The Light" – *Manfred Mann's Earth Band*
"Born To Run" – *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*
"Brilliant Disguise" – *Elvis Costello*
"Brothers Under The Bridge" – *Cowboy Junkies*
"Hungry Heart" – *Mike Love*
"I'm On Fire" – *Bat For Lashes*
"It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City" – *David Bowie*
"Johnny 99" – *Johnny Cash*
"Mansion On The Hill" – *Billy Bragg*
"My City In Ruins" – *Eddie Vedder*
"My Father's House" – *Emmylou Harris*
"Nebraska" – *Steve Earle*
"Pink Cadillac" – *Jerry Lee Lewis*
"Racing In The Street" – *Townes Van Zandt*
"4th Of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)" – *The Hollies*
"State Trooper" – *Arcade Fire*
"Streets Of Philadelphia" – *Richie Havens*
"Thunder Road" – *Kevin Rowland*
"Working On The Highway" – *Joe Ely*

the crap. And when he discovered gratis "I Have Seen The Future etc" badges being handed out at one of his gigs, well…

Meanwhile, back in the boardroom, Appel and Bruce were having the initial argument over the distribution of the newly acquired wealth that would eventually degenerate into a permanent rift twixt manager and musician, both parties filing million-dollar lawsuits against the other alleging breach of contract.

Jon Landau became Springsteen's new manager and Appel filed an injunction preventing Landau from entering a studio with Springsteen and preventing Springsteen entering a studio at all. There followed nearly three years of lay-off and litigation. When Bruce should have been out on the road consolidating the *Born To Run* victory (he loves touring, says he's always fascinated by what his hotel room will look like, how big the bed will be, what colour the carpet and wallpaper will be, if there'd be any weird pictures on the wall: ain't he a lovely bloke?) he was in front of the legal bar.

The basis of the disagreement between Appel and Springsteen is routed in Bruce's naivety when it comes to contracts and Mickey's when it comes to same. Appel had always told Springsteen that he paid the E Street Band far too much money but it wasn't until the royalty cheques for their first hit album began getting delivered by the truckload that Bruce realised how little say he had over the fruits of success he and the boys had been working towards for the best part of a decade…

"We'd suddenly made all this money and contracts we'd signed three years before became important. It wasn't so much the money… I wanted my songs. Mike had the publishing rights to all my songs… when I signed those contracts I didn't even know what publishing was! That whole period was just a time in my life that seemed completely out of my hands. Business is something that I'm pretty easily intimidated by…"

Remarkably, Springsteen holds no grudges against Appel.

"Even when we were in court… he was still a guy that I kinda liked and knew that he kinda liked me."

The final proof that Springsteen survived all the hype, the two years in court and the *looooong* time in the wilderness of enforced retirement is *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*. He has returned with infinitely more maturity, power, soul and fire on his fingertips than he ever had in his life.

"That album… it's about people refusing to let go of their humanity. No matter what they go through, no matter what life does to them, they never let go of their humanity."

"BROOOOOOOOOOCE!!!" FROM THREE and a half thousand throats and the lights go on as the E Streeters hit the opening chords of "Badlands": the same epic, awesome waves of invigorating beautiful noise as before; but Springsteen, striding the planks grinning, his Fender hanging loose on his back, gripping the hand mic tight in both hands, dapper in black jacket and strides… once he starts spitting out the lyrics, makes it plain where he's been all this time, how he's not the same any more…

"Lights out tonight/Trouble in the heartland/Got a head-on collision/Smashin' in my guts, man/I'm caught up in a cross-fire that I DONT UNDERSTAND!/BUT THERE'S ONE THING I KNOW FOR SURE, GIRL!!"

"I was disappointed that the reviews of the album said it sounded depressed," Bruce told me later. "I spelled it out for 'em on the first track…"

"I don't give a damn for the same old played out scenes/Honey, I don't give a damn for just the inbetweens/Honey, I want–the–heart–I–want–the–soul–I want–control right now."

Raw, exhilarating, inspirational… the superlative dictionary is right down the dumper, John. Springsteen – be it in conversation, on record and ESPECIALLY onstage often appears too good to be true. You look for the catch, the flaw, the giveaway. And you look and you LOOK and you keep looking until you finally concede that there isn't a catch. He's the one.

After two years of showbiz decadence, all the free albums and concert tickets, Springsteen is the only geezer I'd pay money to go and see. He's the only person who makes me feel like a fan again. *"I believe in the love you gave me/I believe in the faith that can save me!/I believe in the faith and I pray that someday it may raise me… above these… badlands!!!"*

This is joyous, optimistic rock music. It's what rock'n'roll should have been about and rarely was. He's not, unfortunately, the future of rock'n'roll; he's so good, so vital, so honest that he shows the majority of the rest of 'em up for the squalid cretins they are. The day he quits is the day the music really dies… this guy, this rocker, has actually got some backbone to his work, some MORAL FIBRE.

"Yeah, there's a lotta morality in the show, and it's a very strict morality. Anybody that works for me has gotta understand that. I know how I'd feel if I paid money to see a show and what I wanted wasn't delivered. It comes back to the responsibility thing…"

I've seen great gigs before; The Clash at Harlesden in '77, The Who at The Rainbow in '71, Bowie in Newcastle earlier this year, the Pistols on the Jubilee boat trip or at the two Screen On The Green dates, but what Bruce Springsteen does transcends all of those without a photo-finish. This ain't just the best gig I've ever seen in my life, it's much more than that. It's like watching your entire life flashing by and instead of dying, you're dancing.

Springsteen sings a love song and he doesn't make you smirk the way you would at some fat-zero axe-hero mucho macho man; he makes you ache for the girl you love, he makes you remember her and wish she were here tonight so you wouldn't have to go home alone and without her. I didn't know music could do that to you.

And Springsteen documents the conflict between father and son better than anyone since Steinbeck in *East Of Eden*. There's the raging "Adam Raised A Cain", but the real killer is the unrecorded "Independence Day", possibly the most poignant, moving ballad he's ever written. I was close to tears. At first I thought it was because either I'm too sensitive or else I'm getting soft, but then I realised that rock'n'roll rarely gets this real.

"Well, Papa, I don't know what it was with the two of us/We chose the words and, yeah, we drew the lines/This house, no how could it hold the two

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS

"It ain't good enough just getting by – I wanna take it all the way, every night…"

of us/I guess that we were just too much of the same kind/So say goodbye, it's Independence Day/All boys must run away… come Independence Day/Oh say goodbye, it's Independence Day/All men must make their way/Come Independence Day…"

You want it, you take it, you pay the price… Springsteen, apart from everything else, is also a born performer, frequently jumping offstage and running into the heart of the auditorium, one hand on the mic and another wrapped around a kid in a display of genuine affection.

The E Street Band is a revelation; Danny Federici on organ and Roy Bittan on piano, Steve Van Zandt on guitar, the golden sax of The Big Man Clarence Clemons as always the most important instrument after Springsteen's impassioned, howling voice and with it all nailed down solid by the relentlessly strident rhythm section of Garry Tallent on bass and Max Weinberg on drums. The sound is as full and vibrant as on vinyl but Springsteen's meticulously perfectionist attitude to soundchecks and the electric urgency applied to performing live by everyone onstage takes Springsteen's music to awesome, unprecedented extremes of excellence.

"Something In The Night" and "Streets Of Fire" were both recorded for *Darkness* in just one take. The latter is yet another gem on stage, Springsteen alone at the front of the darkened stage, haunted, tortured, agonising like some tormented Prince Of Denmark, yet totally believable: *"When the night's quiet, and you don't care anymore/And your eyes are tired/And someone's at your door/And you realise… you wanna let go/And the weak lies and the cold walls you embrace…"* The vocal building, the bitter bile of undiluted fury rising in his throat. *"Eat at your insides and – leave – you – face – to – face with STREEEETS OF FIII-RRRE!!!*

And "Factory", possibly the most accurate recording of the drab, dull, soul-destroying boredom of working-class existence ever put on black plastic. Kraftwerk, Devo and all those other industrial-togged turds… do you really believe – and you can add your darling Davie-poo to that list – that their product is "industrial factory folk-muzak of mass-man in the machine-age" *undsoweiter*? You do? You poor, deluded git. I bet you never done a day's work in your miserable life.

"Early in the morning factory whistle blows/Man rises from bed and puts on his clothes/Man takes his lunch, walks out in the morning light/It's the work, the working, just the working life/Through the mansions of fear, through the mansions of pain, I see my daddy walking through them factory gates in the rain/Factory takes his hearing, factory gives him life/It's the work, the working, just the working life/End of the day, factory whistle cries/Men walk through these gates with death in their eyes/And you just better believe, boy/Somebody's gonna get hurt tonight/It's the work, the working, just the working life…"

I love that song. But then I'm still a bit mutt'n'jeff from Distiller's so then I'm biased.

Springsteen performs all of *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, all of *Born To Run*, early songs like "Spirit In The Night" and "Incident On 57th St".

He performs great songs that he gave to other people – "Faith" (Robert Gordon), "Fever" (Southside Johnny), "Because The Night" (Patti Smith) – all of them cutting the cover versions to shreds, smouldering lust paeans, love bites back.

THAT'S BRUCE'S ONE fault to my mind – he's too GENEROUS: nobody else in the history of rock'n'roll has given songs of that quality away. Still, I guess he can afford it, the geezer is a genius, after all.

And when he's played for nearly four hours and it's way past midnight and the houselights have been on for over half an hour but we just won't go away, we refuse to leave the auditorium, we just stand on our seats and scream "BROOOOOOOOCE!!! MOOOOOOORE!!! BROOOOOOCE!!!" he comes back and plays on, all old jukebox giants, Buddy Holly songs, "Quarter To Three", "Devil With The Blue Dress On" and many, many more (no, I didn't take notes). And your heart sinks because it's all over.

What can I tell you, kid? God, I wish you could have been there.

"BRUCE HAS COLLAPSED," his manager Jon Landau tells me 30 minutes after the end of the show. "We'll have to cancel the interview. He's in a state of exhaustion. He can't talk to anyone now."

Usually, I'd know that I was getting served bullshit and the rock star I was ready to interrogate had pissed off back to a gram of coke in the Ritz and was at this moment writhing around in the back of his limo with leather strides around his ankles and a big, fat groupie sitting on him.

With Springsteen it's different; all I can think is… Christ, I hope he's gonna be all right.

But I stick around inside the Palladium, just thinking about the gig. Shit, I got a plane to catch early in the morning so I might as well stay up all night. I couldn't sleep after a show like that anyhow.

"You can come backstage and meet Bruce if you want to," Landau tells me and my heart starts a-pounding. Kid, I've met 'em all… Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, the Pistols, Mike Batt, you name it. Never in my life have I felt awe at the thought of meeting a musician before… Well, I was afraid I'd be let down. Of course, I wasn't; he's exactly what he seems to be – open, honest, warm, personable, friendly, funny, probably the most likeable geezer I've met in my life.

Five feet nine inches with a muscular, tanned, athletic build, an easy smile and a hoarse, rasping laugh, he's relaxed and talkative, ready to listen and you feel like you've known him all your life.

As you've no doubt sussed, I was meant just to say hi and split, but me and Bruce got talking and we just couldn't stop. He talks about the album for a while and when he asks me what I think of it and I tell him it's nowhere near as accessible as *Born To Run* but after repeated playings it stands up as by far the best thing he's ever done, he actually breathes a sigh of relief.

"Phew, that's good… that's what we want people to react like when they hear it."

But, Bruce, surely you ain't worried about it… you must know how good it is…

"Ah, people tell ya so many different things… I just want the people who care about me to know what I'm trying to do. See, it couldn't be an innocent album like *Born To Run* because things ain't like that for me any more. The characters on the new album ain't kids, they're older – you been beat, you been hurt – but there's still hope, there's always hope. They throw dirt on you all your life and some people get buried so deep in the dirt that they never get out. The album's about the people who'll never admit they're buried too deep to get out."

Bruce talks about the three nights he sold out Madison Square Garden in the summer. "I don't usually like playing places that big, but that was for all the long-time supporters, so they could all get in and see us…"

On the first night he brought his 16-year-old sister Pam onstage after dedicating "Sweet Little 16" to her.

And before the final encore on the last Garden date he was dragged back onstage by his Italian mother Adele (his father, Douglas, is Irish, once a factory worker in New Jersey and now a bus driver in Northern California). Bruce was screaming in protest as Adele dragged him to the mic, "Aw, Mom. I can't do any more! I just played four hours! I can't do no more!"

The Garden dates were typical Bruce gigs; intimate and chaotic both, more like a great party than a rock'n'roll show, yet paradoxically the greatest rock'n'roll show in the world.

I inform him that I was at Madison Square Garden a few days ago, standing out front and trying to sell two ELO tickets that CBS had given me. After getting hassled by the local spivs and unable to unload the tickets I decided to take a look inside and use the tickets myself. After seeing that the Garden was just another Wembley and reluctant to watch an ELO show, I decided to leave. But though the Garden was geared to take thousands upon thousands of people into the auditorium, there was no provision for letting people out. All stairs, all halls, all escalators were strictly one way. Travelling in the opposite direction just wasn't allowed. Eventually, I got out. I had to get thrown out by the cops, Bruce.

But this fat cop called 'Heavy' was very nice about it, he only bounced me on the pavement once and waved his nightstick at me but never hit me with it.

Bruce cracks up with laughter. "Hey, I never thought what would happen if somebody wanted to get OUT of one of my shows!!"

And the dogs on Main Street howl, 'cause they understand. ✪

BOSSFACTS

Biographer Dave Marsh claims fellow students at Ocean County Community College petitioned for Springsteen's expulsion on the grounds of his "unacceptable weirdness"

Joe Strummer, with whose "Coma Girl" Springsteen opened his Glastonbury set in 2009, was a longtime fan, once telling a radio interviewer, "Bruce is great. If you don't agree with that, you're a pretentious Martian from Venus. The DJ puts on 'Racing In The Street' and life seems worth living again"

THE RIVER

Good times, bad times… A disorienting see-saw between big night out and calamitous morning after, stretching over two discs.

BY ANDREW MUELLER

13 OCTOBER 1980

EVERY BRUCE Springsteen studio album since his first has been named after one of the songs it contains: that's 15 records on the bounce that have a title track. There are two possible explanations for this. One is that Springsteen is a complacent, bone-idle hack who can barely be bothered to give his works another thought after he's ground his way resentfully to the requisite track count: this seems unlikely. The other is that Springsteen writes for each of his albums one song which he believes emblematic, one which serves as an executive summary of the themes, musical and lyrical, of the record as a whole. You can hear it, to pick a few random examples, in the exuberant fury of "Born To Run", in the anguished patriotism of "Born In The USA", the mournful portent of "Magic", even in the muddled search for meaning of "Human Touch". But you can hear it most of all in Track Six, Side Two, of *The River*.

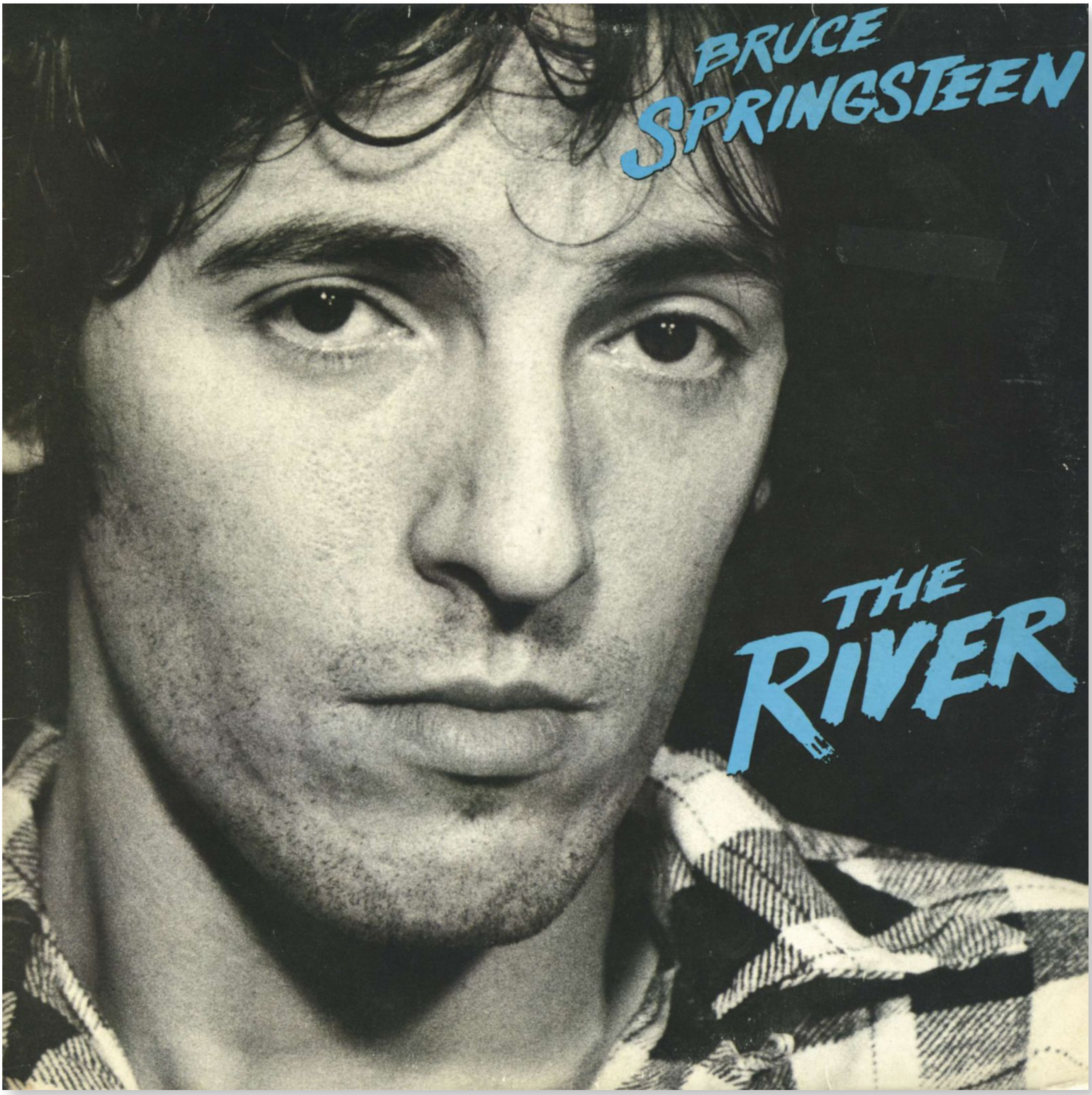
"The River" (the song) defines not only *The River* (the album), but Springsteen (the artist): three decades, half Springsteen's lifetime, since its release, it remains one of his crucial texts. It freights everything that makes him extraordinary. There's his complex relationship with America's songwriting lineage, in which he's bold enough to steal from the greats yet humble enough to acknowledge it ("The River" borrows the motif of a parching creekbed from Hank Williams' "Long Gone Lonesome Blues"). There's his perspicacious paring of a man's concerns down to a fundamental triumvirate of work, women, and what the heck it's all about anyway. There's his assembly of an enduringly superlative backing group ("The River" brandishes the E Street Band at their most stately). There's that voice, maturing as a vehicle for balladry, growing growly and gravelly as its owner passes 30. And most of all where this particular song is concerned, there's the writing.

There are uncountable songwriters who deploy their words chiefly as testaments to their own cleverness: Springsteen has (almost) always been sufficiently disciplined to realise that the work matters more than he does. The writing in "The River" is so clever CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 The Ties That Bind ★★★★
2 Sherry Darling ★★★
3 Jackson Cage ★★★★
4 Two Hearts ★★★★
5 Independence Day ★★★★★
6 Hungry Heart ★★★★
7 Out In The Street ★★★★
8 Crush On You ★★★
9 You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch) ★★★★
10 I Wanna Marry You ★★★
11 The River ★★★★★
12 Point Blank ★★★
13 Cadillac Ranch ★★★★
14 I'm A Rocker ★★★★
15 Fade Away ★★★★
16 Stolen Car ★★★★
17 Ramrod ★★★★
18 The Price You Pay ★★★
19 Drive All Night ★★★
20 Wreck On The Highway ★★★★

Released: October 13, 1980
Produced by: Jon Landau, Bruce Springsteen, Steve Van Zandt
Recorded at: The Power Station, New York
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar, harmonica, piano); Steve Van Zandt (guitars, backing vocals); Clarence Clemons (sax, percussion, bk vocals); Roy Bittan (piano, organ, bk vocals); Garry Tallent (bass); Danny Federici (organ, glockenspiel); Max Weinberg (drums)
Highest chart position: UK 2; US 1


BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
THE RIVER

GLOW-GLITTER
Side Three
POINT BLANK
CADILLAC RANCH
I'M A ROCKER
FADE AWAY
STOLEN CAR
Side Four
RAMROD
THE PRICE YOU PAY
DRIVE ALL NIGHT
WRECK ON THE HIGHWAY
Recorded by NEIL DORFSMAN
Mixed by CHUCK PLOTKIN and TOBY SCOTT
Produced by BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, JON LANDAU, STEVE VAN ZANDT
STEREO
THE RIVER
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
CBS
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S CBS 84623
S CBS 84623 A*
MCPS/BIEM
℗ 1980
Bruce Springsteen
— B. Springsteen —
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MADE IN ENGLAND

that it's very easy to listen to the song many times without realising how clever it is. The very first lines – *"I come from down in the valley/ Where mister, when you're young/They bring you up to do/Just like your daddy done"* – tell you instantly and exactly who and what your narrator is. He's accustomed to subservience: he doesn't know who you are, but he has addressed you as "Mister". He's either or both a proud upholder and resigned prisoner of tradition, doggedly plodding in his father's footsteps. And his education is incomplete – or he'd be doing, with all due respect to the demands of the rhyme, like his daddy did.

Having established his character, Springsteen then exercises enough of an auteur's arrogance to enfold him in his own universe. It can't possibly be coincidental that the pregnant teenage sweetheart with whom our new friend is entwined and entrapped is called Mary. Last time we saw her, she was debating whether or not to walk from her front porch to the front seat of the car being revved outside by some ambitious tearaway and decamp this *"town full of losers"*. By the end of the first verse, Springsteen has you wondering: is this the ardent, wild-eyed suitor she fled to Thunder Road with, or is he some earnest local schlub she stayed behind for?

Either way, it has worked out badly. He's knocked her up, shackling them both to the failing industrial town in which they were born (*"I got Mary pregnant/And man, that was all she wrote"*). The second verse contains a summary of his woes that, again, is much smarter than it appears. There's a reflexive inclination to wince at the line, *"Lately there ain't been much work on account of the economy"*. It's clunky, crashingly unsophisticated, and barely scans. But it's the kind of thing this bewildered blue-collar stiff, whose life is over before he's even turned 20, would say.

That said, the climax of the song contains flights of genuine poetic agility, skilfully trimmed though they are to the plausible limits of the vocabulary of a man to whom you're starting to feel friendly, perhaps protective, or at least regard with there-but-for-the-grace-of-whatever sympathy. His summation of his floundering, dwindling marriage (*"I just act like I don't remember/And Mary acts like she don't care"*) might be a half-remembered hook from a Merle Haggard tune. The song's devastating crescendo pairs conundra which, while certainly philosophically complex, are nevertheless the sort of things often slurringly asked among lubricated drinking buddies as the jukebox is switched off, the lights are switched on, and the bartender enquires whether or not they've homes to go to: *"Is a dream a lie if it don't come true? Or is it something worse?"*

Each of the 20 tracks of this double-album epic is either an effort at solemn contemplation of such existential terrors, or a damn-the-torpedoes attempt to escape them – which is why listening to the entirety of *The River* in one sitting is such a disorienting experience, a continuous careen between big night out and calamitous morning after, as it lurches from joyous, head-back, nigh mindless, garage-rattling rock'n'roll ("I'm A Rocker", "Ramrod", "You Can Look (But You Better Not Touch)", *et al*) and brooding, furrow-browed, pensive, bedsitter blues ("The Price You Pay", "Independence Day", "Fade Away", and so forth). The dichotomy is a consequence of the album's hesitant gestation. *The River* was originally conceived as a single album, a largely upbeat affair to be entitled 'The Ties That Bind', due for release in late 1979 or early 1980. At a late stage in the build-up to the album, Springsteen apparently decided his putative work was lacking in depth and gravitas. Given Springsteen's politics, and his tendency to conscience-of-a-nation hubris, it's easy to imagine he felt it necessary to reflect the recession that had gripped America in the first part of 1980. *The River* ended up being released three weeks before Ronald Reagan routed the decent but hapless Democratic incumbent of the White House, Jimmy Carter.

There's no doubt that *The River*'s songs were, even by Springsteen's mercilessly confessional standards, highly personal...

Springsteen had written about the personal effects of the political before, on such brooding, bitter ballads as "Factory" and "Racing In The Street" on *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, and he'd do it again, most notably on *Nebraska* and *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*. *The River*, though, finds Springsteen growing in confidence as a political writer, as he considers the misfortune of his title track's narrator, and the many generally disregarded millions like him, from a variety of angles.

"Jackson Cage" and "Point Blank" are the most brutal, likening the predicaments of the – female, in both these cases – protagonists to, respectively, prison and execution. "Stolen Car" might almost be a sequel to "The River" – it's another guy awkwardly lamenting the becalming of love (*"We got married, and swore we'd never part/Then little by little we drifted from each other's heart"* – it isn't Yeats, but then neither is the narrator). This time, though, he's done something about it, dumb and self-destructive though it is: *"I'm driving a stolen car/ On a pitch-black night."* Again, given Springsteen's career-long penchant for mining his own mythology, it would be a considerable surprise to discover that the contrast with the climactic declamation of his by-then-ubiquitous road anthem "Born To Run" (*"We'll get to that place where we really want to go/And we'll walk in the sun"*) is altogether accidental.

The sprawling length, colossal ambition and riotously diverse moods and tempos of *The River* would test the abilities, and the patience, and very likely the sanity, of most backing ensembles, but it remains one of the E Street Band's finest hours. They're a six-man jukebox, unloading note-perfect performances of various idioms every time Springsteen kicks them into action – Byrdsian jangle on "The Ties That Bind", Heartbreakers-style barroom-shaking on "Cadillac Ranch", their own patented supercharged synthesis of Beach Boys and prime Motown on "Two Hearts" and "Out In The Street". They even react to being shanghaied into cheap wedding band tuxedos for "I Wanna Marry You" with verve and wit, cheerfully ladling syrup over Springsteen's gruff entreaty: *"To say I'll make your dreams come true would be wrong/But maybe, darlin', I could help them along,"* could come from the same range of Springstonian Hallmark cards as *"You ain't a beauty but hey, you're alright"* ("Thunder Road"), *"Well it ain't no secret, I've been around a time or two/Well I don't know baby, maybe you've been around too"* ("Tougher Than The Rest") and *"When I've lost all the other bets I've made/Honey you're my lucky day"* ("My Lucky Day").

The E Street Band are at their best, however, at the same moments Springsteen is, on the album's two resonant ballads. On "The River", they're a study in coiled rage, Roy Bittan's beautiful, understated piano complementing Steve Van Zandt's 12-string guitar (lifted, he

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ **"This is great music for people who've wasted their youth to sit around drinking beer and wasting the rest of their lives to."**
JULIE BURCHILL, NME, OCTOBER 11, 1980

★ **"Springsteen's taken the hurt of *Darkness...*, and the glory of *Born To Run*, and welded it into an exhilarating blend of rock that nods at all its sources, and then dances out of the speakers in blue jeans and smiles, sorrow and compassion in its hands."**
PAOLO HEWITT, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 6, 1980

The Summit, Houston, Texas, November 14, 1980

has since admitted, from Keith Richards' rhythm parts on The Rolling Stones' "Good Times Bad Times" and "Congratulations"). On "Independence Day", they deploy the same elements to just as crushing an effect. Had this astonishing song appeared on any album that didn't have "The River" on it, it'd be the one everybody still talks about. It is, indeed, surely intended as a companion piece to the title cut. Aside from the obvious musical congruence, it's another one about a boy and his dad, but in this one the kid is saying everything he wishes he'd said in the other song. Which is that he's going to learn from the old man's mistakes – and, perhaps, from the copy of *Born To Run* he might recently have purchased – and hit the road the hell out of here (*"They ain't gonna do to me what I watched them do to you."*).

BOSSFACTS

★ ***The River*** **was performed in its entirety at New York's Madison Square Garden in November 2009, during the** ***Working On A Dream*** **tour**
★ **"Hungry Heart" was originally written for The Ramones**

There's no doubt that these songs were, even by Springsteen's mercilessly confessional standards, personal. The version of "The River" that appears on the *Live 1975-85* box set, recorded at the Los Angeles Coliseum on the *Born In The USA* tour in 1985, is preceded by a lengthy soliloquy in which Springsteen discourses on his tempestuous relationship with his old man. This speech contains one reflexive moment that says much about Springsteen's notions of ethics and patriotism at this point: when the audience whoop at his admission that he failed the physical examination for the Vietnam draft, he rebukes them, muttering, "It's nothing to applaud about". But it mostly illuminates the thinking, and the writing, behind "The River" , both song and album. As Van Zandt picks at his guitar, Springsteen talks about how he and his father would fight so much that the young Bruce would spend as much time as possible out of the house, only coming home when he had no choice, tucking his paternally enraging long hair into his collar and slinking inside hoping to avoid his father and his perennial, unanswerable enquiry: "What did I think I was doing with myself?"

It's the question Springsteen has been asking himself all along, but rarely with the sustained rigour he applies here. The closest he comes to furnishing an answer is the album's desperately bleak sign-off, "Wreck On The Highway". It's a simple enough story – a recollection of pulling up at the immediate aftermath of a traffic accident. And it's a simple enough metaphor – a reminder of the random, arbitrary cruelty with which a life can be ended, or at least upended. Springsteen's only response, as ever, is a suggestion that we reach for what we can hold. He goes home and lies awake next to the woman it's worth going home for, thinks about what he saw, and remembers that the dying man he couldn't help called him "Mister". ✪

TOM CALLINS/RETNA

‘I SAW MYSELF AS A MAN AT LAST AND NOT A KID ANY MORE…’

An audience with The Boss. PAOLO HEWITT discovers the truth about selling out, and about why Springsteen no longer writes “for the people I grew up with as a kid”. Plus: the night Bruce and Miami Steve broke into Graceland!

TAKEN FROM
MELODY MAKER
MAY 9 | 1981

ADRIAN BOOT/URBANIMAGE.TV

STACKED ON the left side of the typewriter are two blank cassettes which should contain the voice of Bruce Springsteen. But like Kevin Rowland and Elvis Costello, Springsteen doesn't like tape recorders or notebooks.

Before starting this European tour he did two formal interviews with music papers – the only press likely to draw him out – one with *Rolling Stone*, the other with *Musician*. And that was enough for Bruce.

He doesn't need that kind of publicity to sell records. He doesn't need it to boost his ego: that kind of superficial security he can do without.

"And also because it ends up me-me-me-me all the time," he told me last week, laughing self-deprecatingly and thumping himself on the chest. So instead we sat in his dressing room and chatted. Within minutes the intensity of the man came through: he was searching for words and talking about matters not easy to articulate.

By the end of the hour I felt as though I'd made a new friend. That intimacy comes through on record, and more so in his current three-hour show, where the songs range from the deep emotion of "Darkness On The Edge Of Town" to the vibrancy of "Rosalita".

On the latter Bruce, Garry Tallent, Clarence Clemons and Miami Steve jump down into the audience to heighten the communication, performer and listener look each other straight in the eye.

The same was true offstage; with the tape whirring the conversation we had could never have happened. So how do I know I haven't misquoted him? That's just the price you pay.

Because it's been six years since he last played here, and the aura that surrounds him, Bruce Springsteen has become a legend, an untouchable saviour even.

The mystique is perpetuated by stories of mammoth concerts that become celebrations, climbing billboards to deface his posters, opening shows with "Badlands" on the day of Ronald Reagan's election.

And here, coming down the lobby of the hotel Sofitel in Lyon, France, is Bruce with girlfriend Joyce. "Going out to play golf?" jokes one of the road crew.

Along comes Dave Marsh, Springsteen biographer and husband of tour manager Barbara Carr. "Us guys are going out to have a look around the town right now, but we'll be back later. Catch you then." And off he went to catch up with Bruce.

Six-thirty, and still no sign of the tickets for tonight's show, so I head for the bar. Two bearded muscular technicians wearing Springsteen T-shirts are sitting there.

"What time's the show tonight?" I ask.

"There ain't one," says one of the guys. "Least we ain't going to be there if there is." And they burst into laughter.

"What do you mean? I was told tonight."

"Like we said, no show. It's tomorrow. The president's got the hall tonight to make an election speech or somethin'. Gig's cancelled. It's tomorrow."

I get that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach. I've only got enough money to stay tonight. Then Dave Marsh walks into the lobby. I explain my predicament. "Don't worry," said Dave. "Bruce will look after you."

AND THE NEXT night he did. After my first Springsteen concert, still suffering from "the first time you see Bruce glow," as they call it, he welcomes me into his dressing room.

Bruce is wearing a tastefully embroidered shirt and smells faintly of embrocation; I'm a bundle of nerves. I stall for time and ask him about Robert De Niro.

Somewhere along the line I'd heard they were old drinking buddies. Legend even has it that Bruce gave Robert De Niro the immortal "Are you talking to me?" line from *Taxi Driver*.

CHRIS WALTER/WIREIMAGE

"Nah," says Bruce. "I met him a few times, but Clarence knows him better. You should ask Clarence about him."

It's time to start talking seriously. How does he feel in retrospect about his early albums?

He grimaces. "Ah, I was kinda loose when I made those," he says dismissively. "The other day, in fact, I was driving home and 'Blinded By The Light' came on the radio and…" He flicks an imaginary switch off in mid-air.

We move on to the infamous hype period that CBS instigated for his dramatic *Born To Run* album. An album that simultaneously nearly killed him, but instead set him up as the Great White Hope.

"Well one of the bad things about all that hype business," says Bruce in almost a whisper, "was that it made us look as though we'd come up from nowhere when we'd been playing the bars for years before that."

To get away from the intense pressure that followed, Bruce packed his bags and headed for home: New Jersey, where he was brought up. There, he says, he discovered himself. As a kid he never bothered with reading books or any of that style. Back in Jersey he started reading.

Could he give any titles? Bruce motions to the bags that have been packed and ready to go back to the hotel.

"I made a list, actually, of all the books I had read and were important to me, but I guess it's somewhere in there." Currently he's engrossed in a history of the United States.

Also in Jersey he discovered movies. "I started going to see films for something else other than enjoyment."

It was from this period of self-awareness that *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* was created. Bruce had not only discovered himself, but he'd also seen the lives of those around him. The forces that had affected them.

He agrees now that *Born To Run*, his previous album to this period of discovery about life and himself, did have "a lot of overblown romance. But it still contained the seeds of realism." The last verse of "Jungleland", Bruce points to as proof of this assertion.

These seeds of realism flowered on *Darkness*. His toughest album and most realistic, when it appeared in '78 it locked in perfectly with the mood that punk had created in England. But whereas punk was only starting to address the problems of identity and purpose, Bruce nailed the problem in one.

"Yeah, it's funny that," says Bruce, "because in America I looked around and no-one was writing about this kind of stuff." Later on Bruce describes *Darkness* as "a guy trying to discover who he is and where he's going to."

Did he think *Darkness* was optimistic? "Yeah, I think so," he affirms. "'Badlands' – that's optimistic, raising yourself above it all."

We move on to *The River*. He tells me that out of his five albums, this one is his favourite.

I tell him that it seems to be a balance between the romance and glory of *Born To Run* and the gritty, hard realism of *Darkness*.

Eagerly he agrees. To him, it's so important to have the two. "That's why we put 'I Wanna Marry You' next to 'The River'. 'I Wanna Marry You' is a guy who sees someone from a corner and as soon as he does it's…" he motions with his hands to try to articulate that first rush of blood and love. "It's…" he repeats, both of us laughing.

"But 'The River' itself balances that out," he says, getting serious again. "So you have the two of them. And that's important." He goes on to explain further. To him, during the '70s, because of the things that have rocked the nation – "things like Watergate" – people have just lost the ability to dream.

"It's been knocked out of people," he says wistfully. What a part of his music does is try to re-establish that quality.

One of the reasons he loves rock'n'roll is because it gives people a vitality and sense of being alive. From "Anarchy In The UK" to "Born To Run", anyone can testify to that vitality. Dreaming is part of that sense of being alive, hence Bruce's interest and stress on it. At the same time, though, he realises that songs like "Cadillac Ranch" and "Fun" must be balanced by the kind of realism to be found on *Darkness*.

"That's just as important."

There are other matters, too. Bruce sees himself and fellow E Streeters presenting and representing some kind of idea. Part of that idea is to remain as accessible as ever. This is a Very Important Thing.

But how, I wonder, did Springsteen balance that accessibility with the huge success he is now enjoying?

On every single date of his European tour he has sold out consistently. In Britain, 250,000 people wanted to see him at Wembley. In Amsterdam they wanted to give him platinum records for *The River*.

He explains carefully and with great deliberation: "I haven't changed my way of living all that much, you know." He's always been lucky enough to eschew the trappings of success. It's something he hasn't found hard to do.

"I don't know if I can articulate this properly," he says, frowning. "But this room," – and he gestures to the quite large place we're sitting in – "and money, it's there but it's not important. It's not the end.

"You see, the sell-out doesn't occur when you take your first limousine ride. It happens in here," thumping his heart. "And somewhere private." The reason it hadn't happened to him was because he wasn't built in a way that he could be sucked into it. "A lot of good people with something to say have fallen into that trap," he says quietly. "It's when you get fat and lose your hunger," he stresses "that is when you know the sell-out has happened."

That's why that trip back to Jersey was so important for him round about the time of *Born To Run*, when he first walked into enormous success. Because he knew who he was, where he was coming from and what he was writing about, he could see the dangers inherent in succumbing to the temptations. "*Darkness* was the first album where, afterwards, I saw myself as a man at last and not a kid any more."

Another reason for his ability to be true is the people he surrounds himself with. Good people who guided him and protected him, but not in a cotton wool manner. Honest people.

BRUCE'S WRITING has changed a great deal now, a fact he readily admits. "I'm not writing for the people I grew up with as a kid," he snorts, "because they're all married with a dog and kids now."

He writes about himself and the way he sees things now. As a man. He hopes the people who come to see the show are able to feel a two-way thing with the band. Each party can look into each other's eyes.

Did religion ever affect him, I wonder? He shakes his head and tells of how, at an early age, he realised that the people teaching it relied on fear to instil it in him. He looks up at the ceiling when he's saying all this and I tell him that's exactly why I stay in bed on Sundays now. You shouldn't have to look up to anything.

"A lot of good people have fallen into the sell-out trap. It's when you get fat and lose your hunger..."

"That's it!" he shouts, grabbing my arm. "It should be like this," and we're face to face.

Time now, though, is running out. People keep entering the dressing room to take things out to the truck and they keep giving Bruce lightning glances.

Sensing this, I ask him what else is good about the band and the music he's playing. Putting out his hands he stresses how music has become far too divided. "It's stupid," he says. "If you like this music and can't like that music. And if you like that music you can't like this music. That's how it's gotten and we aim to smash all that. Transcend those barriers. We get all kinds of ages at our gigs and that's great."

At this point Dave Marsh enters the dressing room to tell us he's going and clearly, though we've only touched the tip of the iceberg, enough is enough. When Joyce comes in a minute later it really is time to go.

As we pack up our stuff I ask Bruce a last question about a story he had told onstage that night. It had been told as an introduction to Bruce's version of Woodie Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land", and concerned the time Bruce and Miami Steve had played a gig in Memphis and afterwards decided to visit Elvis' house at about 3am.

BOSSFACTS

Bruce wrote "From Small Things (Big Things One Day Come)" for Dave Edmunds, and first played it to him in his dressing room after a 1981 show at London's Wembley Arena

"Was that true?" I asked.

"Oh yeah," smiles Bruce. "Actually me and Steve were hungry. We asked this taxi driver where the best place to eat was. He said Graceland and I said forget the food, let's go see Elvis."

Which is what the boys did. The taxi driver wasn't too keen on the idea, however, and kept warning them about the dogs and guards that surrounded the house. Bruce took no notice and told him to keep driving.

When they all got there Bruce scaled up the wall to Elvis' house and started up the driveway. As he got nearer he could see that there was only one light on in the entire house.

Suddenly from out the woods, out stepped a guard.

"What do you want," he asked, his gun hanging from his hip. "I come to see Elvis," Bruce said innocently.

"He ain't here," the guard replied. "He's in Lake Tahoe."

Figuring that the guard was lying, and glancing once more at that window with its light shining bright, Bruce explained he was in a band. They'd played Memphis that night. They were quite a popular band.

In fact, Bruce had been on the cover of *Newsweek* ("And I never tell anyone that," laughs Bruce, "which shows what a cheap shot it was.").

The guard remained unimpressed.

"Well can you tell him I called?" asked Bruce. The guard said he would and Bruce walked back down the drive, glancing back at that one room.

"And you know," says Bruce, "that light in that room... it just had to be Elvis."

As long as he keeps thinking that, then the Promised Land is still only round the corner.

WHAT'S HE REALLY like? On my return to England I heard that phrase more times than I care to mention. And the answer was always the same. Bruce Springsteen is rare. Rare in that he is totally unlike any rock star – or whatever the phrase is – I've ever come across. He actually is himself, not an image. There's no falseness, no show, no pretensions.

He knows who he is and he isn't ashamed, nor does he try to hide himself. And he's intelligent, immensely likeable, a little vulnerable, moral, strong. And above all, alive.

He refuses to go under, come Watergate or Reagan. Two incidents in Rotterdam last week show the kind of man he is.

After the first gig, a party was held to give Bruce some platinum records. Dick Asher, who is a very important person within his record company's scheme of things, had flown in to make the presentation. Only Bruce didn't make it. He felt ill. And his first responsibility is to his audience, not to bigshots.

Earlier that night he sang "This Land Is Your Land". He'd changed one of the last lines to *"From California to the streets of Brixton."* ✪

REX FEATURES

NEBRASKA

Alone at home in New Jersey, Springsteen contemplates sin and mortality, and concludes, *"I guess there's just a meanness in this world…"* BY NEIL SPENCER

30 SEPTEMBER 1982

AS 1981 WOUND down, the world should have looked rosy to Bruce Springsteen. He and the E Street Band were coming off a triumphant 18-month world tour in support of *The River*, with both record and shows rapturously received. His next album would surely move him further up the rock pantheon, preferably helped there by some hit singles – there was disappointment in the Springsteen camp that only "Hungry Heart" had charted from *The River*. From here on there would surely be no giving away surefire hits like "Because The Night".

Yet Springsteen couldn't settle. Instead of exuberance, he found himself facing what he later described as "a deep sense of isolation". Just at the point when he was required to come up with triumphant rock anthems, his creative demon was dragging him in a quite opposite direction. What now arrived were songs about characters from the very margins of American society, people whom hope and deliverance had passed by: killers on death row, petty gangsters, children caught in despair, cops compromised by their family.

These were outsiders beyond the misfits and upstanding working folk Springsteen had so far hymned; they weren't just rebels, they were criminals, or at least, people forced by social circumstance into criminality. These were the lives of the dispossessed, far removed from the triumphant USA being described by President Ronald Reagan in his first term of office, while Springsteen's empathy for them belonged to a culture of disaffection that CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Nebraska ★★★★★
2 Atlantic City ★★★★★
3 Mansion On The Hill ★★★
4 Johnny 99 ★★★
5 Highway Patrolman ★★★★
6 State Trooper ★★★
7 Used Cars ★★★
8 Open All Night ★★★
9 My Father's House ★★★★
10 Reason To Believe ★★★★

Released: September 30, 1982
Recorded: At home, Holmdel, New Jersey
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (guitar, harmonica, glockenspiel, mandolin, organ)
Highest chart position: UK 3; US 3

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
THE SOLO-ALBUM
featuring
ATLANTIC CITY
HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
MY FATHER'S HOUSE
25100
NEBRASKA

NEBRASKA
ATLANTIC CITY
MANSION ON THE HILL
JOHNNY 99
HIGHWAY PATROLMAN
STATE TROOPER
USED CARS
OPEN ALL NIGHT
MY FATHER'S HOUSE
REASON TO BELIEVE
25100

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NEBRASKA
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
STEREO
33⅓ RPM
CBS 25100-1
AL 38358
1
BIEM/STEMRA
CBS 25100
(TC 38358)
1. NEBRASKA (4:27) 2. ATLANTIC CITY (3:54)
3. MANSION ON THE HILL (4:03) 4. JOHNNY 99 (3:38)
5. HIGHWAY PATROLMAN (5:39) 6. STATE TROOPER
(3:15) (B. Springsteen) Bruce Springsteen
℗ 1982 Bruce Springsteen
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stretched back through John Steinbeck and Woody Guthrie, a heritage that had recently impacted forcefully on the 32-year-old singer.

Still, the songs' noble lineage didn't make them chart material – in the prevailing political climate, quite the opposite – while in the studio Springsteen's musicians struggled to animate them. Out of this impasse grew one of Springsteen's most courageous albums. It was everything his previous records weren't; slow, sparse, sombre, solo. Dispensing with the services of a band, *Nebraska* became a lo-fi masterpiece that would resonate way into the future, becoming a touchstone of Springsteen's integrity as an artist, and a template for the next generation of Americana acts. A dozen years later, Springsteen himself would revisit it on *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*.

The gestation of *Nebraska* had roots in several areas of Springsteen's life. Surprisingly, Europe was one of them. When he had "finally got up the nerve to go back there", Springsteen had found himself in a two-way love affair with the Old World. Not only did its audiences adore him, but the singer found its atmosphere congenial. As he put it later, "In America in the early '80s, a sense of violence was in the air… I experienced less of that in Europe – it seemed more civil, more sane."

Simultaneously, Springsteen had discovered history. Manager and producer Jon Landau had introduced Springsteen to the canon of American cinema, to the angst-ridden moods of noir and the majesty of John Ford's westerns, and in particular Ford's 1940 epic, *The Grapes Of Wrath*, a state of the nation movie whose dust bowl émigrés and blue-collar nobility spoke directly to Springsteen's sensibilities. "From *The Grapes Of Wrath* I got an elegiac view of history – warmth, fidelity, duty – the good soldier's qualities," he later reflected.

At school the teenage Springsteen had been a disinterested student, a loner with a guitar. Now he explored avidly. He devoured Joe Klein's biography of Woody Guthrie and relished the gothic characters of Flannery O'Connor's stories. The closing stages of *The River* tour also found him commending Allan Nevins' *A Pocket History Of The United States* from the stages where he sang Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land". It was an act of alternative patriotism, an antidote to Reagan's red, white and blue drum-beating. At this time Springsteen also wrote the first of *Nebraska*'s 10 songs, "Mansion On The Hill", its title and theme unashamedly borrowed from Hank Williams.

The more immediate genesis of *Nebraska* lay in Springsteen's request to his guitar tech, Mike Batlan, for home recording equipment. Primed with a TEAC four-track tape recorder, Springsteen began work on his own on January 3, 1982, using just guitar and harmonica with dabs of glockenspiel, mandolin and organ. The songs leapt unforced into life, but when their composer presented the results of his labours to Landau and the band, the resultant sessions drove into sand. It was as if the natural exuberance within the E Street collective was fighting the desolate mood of the material.

They had better luck with the more recent numbers Springsteen brought to the studio – "I'm On Fire, "Glory Days, "Downbound Train" and "Born In The USA", the last being the one song from Springsteen's home demos that lent itself to anthemic treatment. Otherwise the *Nebraska* tapes remained sullenly themselves. Eventually, urged on by Steve Van Zandt, Landau and Springsteen decided to put the songs out as they had been recorded, presenting engineer Chuck Plotkin with the problem of mastering the tapes and losing their hiss.

> **Cavernous production, raw performance, the sense of being in the presence of an artist during the act of creation…**

When it appeared in September 1982, *Nebraska* delighted the critics but confounded large swathes of Springsteen's hard-won rock following, and while it sailed to No 3 in the Billboard charts, the album as quickly sank from sight. There was no accompanying tour to promote the record – by then *Born In The USA* was in full preparation – though it did spawn Springsteen's first MTV video, for "Atlantic City", shot in edgy black and white.

Nebraska's downbeat mood starts on its cover, a grimy black-and-white shot of a snow-crusted windscreen and a desolate landscape pierced by a scarcely discernible stretch of tarmac. Coming from rock's poet of the open road, its message was clear; the highway no longer promised escape and fulfilment, just a dangerous ride into an unpromising future.

Nothing underscores that mood more than the opening title track. Its tale is based on an infamous 1958 murder spree, when 20-year-old Charles Starkweather and his teenage girlfriend went on the run across Nebraska, killing anyone in their path. The story was already familiar to Springsteen through another cinematic favourite, Terrence Malick's 1973 *Badlands*, whose title had already been borrowed for "Badlands" on *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*. But where that song promised triumph – *"We'll keep pushing till it's understood/These badlands start treating us good"* – here there is no salvation, only death, whether at the hands of the delinquent runaways or, in Starkweather's case, the hangman's noose. The song captures his final moments with brutal economy: *"Midnight in a prison storeroom with leather straps across my chest."*

Like Starkweather, Springsteen's narrator proffers no remorse, just the observation that, *"I guess there's just a meanness in this world"*, a comment that reflects Hannah Arendt's description of " the banality of evil", or perhaps, Catholicism's insistence on 'original sin'.

The same studied amorality courses through much else on *Nebraska*. The narrator of "Atlantic City", a petty criminal caught up in the gambling resort's turf wars, is planning *"to do a little favour"* for someone – a murder, maybe – in order to get ahead of *"debts no honest man can pay"*. That same phrase reappears on "Johnny 99", where a laid-off car worker threatened with losing his home gets drunk, fluffs a robbery, and shoots a night clerk. Faced with a 99-year prison term, he asks the judge to reconsider and *"let 'em shave off my hair and put me on that execution line"*.

Transgression is also the theme on "Highway Patrolman", where a cop is forced to choose between arresting his own brother for what seems like a murder (*"a kid lyin' on the floor lookin' bad bleedin' hard from the head"*) or letting him escape across the Canadian border. In the end the trooper pulls over and *"watched his tail lights disappear"*. The song's backstory is just as potent, relating how bad brother Frankie had come home from the army in '68 (the first time Vietnam appears in a Springsteen song) and, on a glorious chorus, remembering the two brothers *"Taking turns dancing with Maria… Nothin' feels better than blood on blood."*

The bonds of family are another strand in *Nebraska*, there on "Used Cars", where a young man watches as his father *"sweats the same job from mornin' to morn"* and longs for escape, and on "Mansion On The Hill". Springsteen later considered that his mood of unease at the time he wrote *Nebraska* "led me back to childhood and people I remembered from my father's side of the family… I was trying to get a feeling for what was going on, the forces that affected my parents' lives. The whole thing of the wasted life – it was very powerful to me."

Quite aside from its uncompromising subject matter and the force of its storytelling, one of the delights of *Nebraska* is its sonic austerity.

BOSSFACTS

- ★ **When researching the Starkweather murders for the album's title track, Springsteen rang Ninette Beaver, the reporter of the original 1958 story**
- ★ **The reference to the band playing "Night Of The Johnstown Flood" in "Highway Patrolman" appears to be an invention. There are folk ballads about the devastating 1889 Pennsylvania flood, but surely not one a road house band would play**
- ★ **Johnny Cash covered "Johnny 99" and 'Highway Patrolman" on his 1983 LP, *Johnny 99***
- ★ **The 2000 Sub Pop tribute album *Badlands* included *Nebraska* songs by Ben Harper, Los Lobos, Aimee Mann and Hank Williams III, who reinvented "Atlantic City" as bluegrass**

The cavernous production, the rawness of its performances, Springsteen's spontaneous yips and yelps, the sense of being in the presence of an artist during the act of creation, rather than being confronted with a much polished artefact – all amplify the songs' sentiments in a way no breast-beating, sax-tooting, drum-thrashing E Street treatment could.

Musically, Springsteen is clearly connecting to the spirit of Woody Guthrie, much as early Dylan had. Springsteen had long buried the allegation/claim that he was 'The New Dylan'; the verbal barrage of *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ* was history. *Nebraska*, though, is where Bruce's real debt to Bob becomes apparent. The wearied suck'n'blow harmonica that introduces "Nebraska" is not merely 'Dylanesque', it's virtually a playback of Dylan's harp part on "Visions Of Johanna". Springsteen's accent also seems to have broadened from its East Coast origins into a more timeless, Midwestern burr.

Other musical spirits are raised, however. The solo electric guitar that drives "Open All Night", the only upbeat number on the album, is borrowed from Chuck Berry's "Promised Land", while the echoing guitar of "State Trooper" and its edgy vocal recall 'death discs' like Jody Reynolds' "Endless Sleep", works with which early pop obsessive Springsteen would have been familiar.

"My Father's House" stands in the tradition of the American hymnal, solemn and stately. Its theme – a prodigal son calling on a forsaken family home – echoes Ralph Stanley's "Rank Stranger", and carries the same ambivalence; the parent in question has not simply changed home, he's moved onto a celestial realm. Stranded in mortality, his son can only wonder at a homely vision *"shining on this dark highway where our sins lie unatoned"*.

Sin and mortality infuse *Nebraska*. Springsteen never was an ardent Roman Catholic (he loathed the cruelty of the nuns at his RC school), but Christian themes are never far away here. Twice, a song's character calls out for "deliverance". The illegal driver on the New Jersey Turnpike, desperate not to be stopped, calls out for *"Somebody out there, listen to my last prayer/Hiho silver-o, deliver me from nowhere."*

The same plea is echoed, in more upbeat style, on "Open All Night", a more conventional Springsteen song where his highway hero is listening to gospel stations *"callin' long distance salvation"* and pleading for a rock'n'roll DJ to *"deliver me from nowhere"*.

The question of deliverance is addressed directly on "Reason To Believe", the most overtly religious song here, in which Springsteen contemplates the cycle of birth and death and asks *"Lord, won't you tell us what does it mean?"* Answer comes there none, yet he notes that, be it abandoned wife or stood-up groom, *"At the end of every hard-earned day people find some reason to believe"*. The song's simplicity – a rolling blues – and Springsteen's detachment combine to suggest that despite all the pressures and many disappointments of life, despite *"the meanness in this world"*, there is still hope. ✪

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ "Perhaps a better title for this LP would have been 'Yet More Songs About Cars And Guys And The Meaning Of Life', because yes, you guessed it, Springsteen seems completely unable to move away from his overblown, romanticised view of the world." PAOLO HEWITT, MELODY MAKER, SEPTEMBER 25, 1982

★ "No longer ground down by the need to prove his honesty by wearing his heart in his holler, he's now writing and singing in the testy troubadour tradition of entertaining with a kick." CHRIS BOHN, NME, SEPTEMBER 25, 1982

DAVID MICHAEL KENNEDY

BORN IN THE USA

The glory days. Deification at the hands of 30m album-buyers — and, bizarrely, Ronald Reagan. BY JOHN LEWIS

4 JUNE 1984

TODAY, WE ALL think we've got a handle on Bruce's politics. He's the celebrity liberal, the troubadour for John Kerry's election campaign and the composer of songs for Barack Obama. He's the union man who pays tribute to Pete Seeger, supports gay marriage and soundtracks films about people living with AIDS.

So, in retrospect, it seems faintly surreal that Ronald Reagan's aides wanted to use "Born In The USA" as a patriotic anthem during the 1984 election campaign, and weirder still that Reagan, during a stump speech in New Jersey, made a fulsome tribute to The Boss. It seems as ridiculous as, say, Thatcher singing the praises of Billy Bragg at a mid-'80s Tory Party rally.

The key difference, though, is that The Boss' politics have always been rather more complex and ambiguous. Part of his across-the-board appeal has been that everyone has been able to project their own beliefs upon him. Right-wing conservatives – who still comprise a sizeable chunk of Springsteen's audience – will pick up on his smalltown ornery working-man schtick, his patriotism, his apparent nostalgia for a more innocent America, and his celebrations of home, family, community and reconciliation. Middle-class mortgage payers will punch the air along with The Boss, vicariously celebrating a life that they will never lead. For much of his career, Springsteen appeared to be happy with this. For him, rock'n'roll was a social glue, not a cause of petty divisiveness that set old against young, black against white, right against left.

Tellingly, he never distanced himself too heavily from Reagan's endorsement. At one live concert in September 1984, he wryly suggested that the president probably hadn't been listening to *Nebraska*, and Boss loyalists knew he was drawing lines between Reagan's patriotic conservatism and that album's bleak socialist realism. *Born In The USA* is, in places, as dark as *Nebraska*, but it is also a more paradoxical LP – both sonically progressive and melodically reactionary, politically radical yet emotionally conservative. The songs' narrators tend to be alienated, post-industrial men, suffering a crisis in masculinity, angry at the injustices wrought by corporate greed and government mismanagement. They are nostalgic for a mythic America but abundantly aware that such a place never really existed. They tend to be grown men in their thirties, baby boomers reflecting on their reckless youth, lived following the "Born To Run"/"Hungry Heart" principles CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Born In The USA ★★★★★
2 Cover Me ★★★
3 Darlington County ★★★★
4 Working On The Highway ★★★★
5 Downbound Train ★★
6 I'm On Fire ★★★★★
7 No Surrender ★★★★
8 Bobby Jean ★★★★★
9 I'm Goin' Down ★★★★
10 Glory Days ★★★★
11 Dancing In The Dark ★★★
12 My Hometown ★★★★

Released: June 4, 1984
Produced by: Jon Landau, Chuck Plotkin, Steve Van Zandt, Bruce Springsteen
Recorded: The Power Station and The Hit Factory, New York
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar); Clarence Clemons (saxophone, percussion, backing vocals); Roy Bittan (synthesiser, piano, backing vocals); Danny Federici (organ, glockenspiel, piano on "Born In The USA"); Garry Tallent (bass, backing vocals); Steven Van Zandt (acoustic guitar, mandolin, harmony vocals); Max Weinberg (drums, backing vocals); La Bamba (backing vocals on "Cover Me" and "No Surrender"); Ruth Jackson (backing vocals on "My Hometown")
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 1

BORN IN THE U.S.A./BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

SIDE 1
BORN IN THE U.S.A.
COVER ME
DARLINGTON COUNTY
WORKING ON THE HIGHWAY
DOWNBOUND TRAIN
I'M ON FIRE
SIDE 2
NO SURRENDER
BOBBY JEAN
I'M GOIN' DOWN
GLORY DAYS
DANCING IN THE DARK
MY HOMETOWN
PRODUCED BY:
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN, JON LANDAU, CHUCK PLOTKIN, STEVE VAN ZANDT
PERFORMED BY: THE E STREET BAND:
ROY BITTAN, CLARENCE CLEMONS, DANNY FEDERICI,
GARRY TALLENT, STEVE VAN ZANDT, MAX WEINBERG
RECORDED BY: TOBY SCOTT/MIXED BY: BOB CLEARMOUNTAIN
ART DIRECTION & DESIGN: ANDREA KLEIN / PHOTOGRAPHY: ANNIE LEIBOVITZ
CBS

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BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
33⅓ RPM
LC 0149
STEREO
1
CBS 86304
CBS 86304 A*
MCPS/BIEM
℗ 1984 Bruce Springsteen
1. BORN IN THE U.S.A (4.39)
2. COVER ME (3.26)
3. DARLINGTON COUNTY (4.48)
4. WORKING ON THE HIGHWAY (3.11)
5. DOWNBOUND TRAIN (3.35)
6. I'M ON FIRE (2.36)
(All titles written by Bruce Springsteen)
(1-6) Zomba Music Publishers Ltd.
Original sound recording made by Bruce Springsteen
CBS AND ® CBS INC.

of rock'n'roll (*"We learned more from a three-minute record, baby/Than we ever learned in school,"* announces the narrator of "No Surrender"). They have suffered, but they also tend to show an ability to make the best of what little they have, something emphasised by Springsteen's triumphalist delivery and the fact that nearly every track is in a major key.

The title track of *Born In The USA* is a perfect example of these paradoxes. The narrator endures a rough, abusive childhood before finding refuge in the Army. He survives a spell in Vietnam where he sees his best friend killed. On his return home to civilian life, he is abused, maltreated, made redundant, and finds himself swinging between homelessness and prison. He is betrayed by patriotism and lied to by government – as much a victim of a senseless war as any Vietnamese peasant – but yet his spirit remains unbowed. The minimal acoustic demo, available on the *18 Tracks* compilation, accentuates the song's bleak lyric. However, the album version, recorded 18 months later, undercuts the song's protest credentials with a bombastic production job; Max Weinberg's thunderous, martial drums and Roy Bittan's synth fanfare giving it the feel of a chest-beating patriotic anthem.

The reason why everyone wanted a piece of the Boss is, of course, because *Born In The USA* was absolutely enormous. Like Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, the album it replaced atop the Billboard chart, it spawned seven hit singles and topped the charts in virtually every territory on earth. It went platinum in the States within a month, eventually going 15-times platinum and selling more than 30 million copies worldwide. It is, by some considerable distance, Springsteen's biggest ever album. Springsteen himself was uncomfortable with the level of fame that it brought him, and wary that the album had reclassified him from being an "album-orientated" rock artist to a purveyor of pop singles. "It forced me to question the way I presented my music," he wrote in the introduction to *Songs*, "and made me think harder about what I was doing."

"Born In The USA" and "Working On The Highway" were initially recorded in January 1982 on a reel-to-reel in Springsteen's home in Holmdel, New Jersey, part of the demo sessions that later formed the bulk of *Nebraska*. He was unhappy with both songs, and didn't even present them to the band at the time, feeling that it didn't fit in with their sound. It turns out that much of what Springsteen was writing around that time – he's thought to have written about 60 songs in the 18 months after *Nebraska* – didn't really fit into the classic E-Street Band mould. When it came to reconvening his band in 1983, it was clear that the Springsteen sound had to be radically reconfigured.

With the exception of "Darlington County" (a ringer for *The River*'s "Cadillac Ranch", and a song actually written in 1978 during the *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* sessions), little survives from the classic E Street Band configuration that was forged a decade earlier. Saxophonist Clarence Clemons sits out most of the album, appearing only to provide haunted codas to "Dancing In The Dark" and "Bobby Jean". Max Weinberg's snare drums take on that gated reverb so ubiquitous at the time, while the guitars come with that heavily chorused crunch that characterise so many '80s records.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ "Despite the familiarity of themes and forms, *Born In The USA* makes a stand in the teeth of history and stirs a few unfashionable emotions. You may prefer your entertainment a trifle less autumnal, but then again, it's not just entertainment."
ADAM SWEETING, MELODY MAKER, JULY 28, 1984

★ "By abandoning all that 'rebel triumphant' blabber'n'smoke, Bruce Springsteen displays the kind of moral and artistic integrity that rock music rarely shows any more. The power of *Born In The USA* is less flashy and less intoxicating, but it is far more real than the power of his early work; this is the power of an artist telling the truth."
CHARLES SHAAR MURRAY, NME, AUGUST 4, 1984

One hallmark of the E Street Band was always the organ/piano conversation between Federici and Bittan; that classic gospel double-act, popularised by The Band, which balances rhythmic piano with sustained Hammond lines. This dynamic was all but removed on *Born*... Bittan switches from piano to synth on the title track and "Dancing In The Dark", while even his piano parts have that glutinous, bell-like quality that suggests a Yamaha DX7. Likewise Danny Federici's organ takes on a plasticky, slightly ethereal tone on tracks such as "I'm On Fire" and "Glory Days".

If such sonic tropes carbon date this album more significantly than any other Springsteen release, they also succeeded in capturing the pop zeitgeist, creating a string of singles that were machine-tooled for '80s FM radio. It meant that Springsteen, unlike comparable legends such as Dylan and Neil Young, never became an irrelevancy in the '80s. Springsteen never looked out of his depth in the MTV world, and fully embraced the compressed production techniques of the time.

The lead single, "Dancing In The Dark", is the most radical overhaul. It might have introduced Bruce to the '80s, rebooted his career and turned him into a singles artist, but the song remains a messy dance-rock compromise, largely sequenced on synths and reeking of hair gel. A more convincing pop fusion is "Cover Me", which was initially earmarked as a disco track for Donna Summer until Jon Landau convinced him that it would make an ideal single (Summer instead got a Springsteen number called "Protection").

However, as well as moving into the '80s, *Born In The USA* harks back further than Springsteen has ever done. "Working On The Highway" and "I'm On Fire" delve deep in the 1950s. Both mix a rockabilly guitar and rimshot drumming; both see him doing very different types of Elvis impression ("Working On The Highway" is the hollering Elvis of "Mystery Train", while "I'm On Fire" is the closely-mic'd baritone crooner of "Love Me Tender"). Incidentally, the latter is Springsteen's first country-and-western flirtation on the album; if you dig out your vinyl version and play "I'm On Fire" at 45rpm, as many pranksters did, you'll notice that it sounds uncannily like a Dolly Parton track. The other nod to C&W is "I'm Goin' Down", which sounds in places like Johnny Cash. Both paved the way for the more explicit country flavours of *Tunnel Of Love*.

Lyrically, if there is a unifying theme to the album, it is one of the adult looking back at his youth. Curiously, the mood is similar to 1982's *The Nightfly* by Donald Fagen, another babyboomer

Meadowlands Arena, New Jersey, August 8, 1984

revisiting the '50s and '60s, with enough detachment to realise that the past wasn't always such a great place, and that the American Dream was always tainted. Of course Springsteen's characters are rather more hard-bitten than Fagen's Ivy Leaguers; as with *Nebraska* and *Darkness*, the cast of *Born In The USA* are blue-collar Americans who discover that life is harder than the world promised by their carefree childhood dreams. Yet these characters are determined to party through the hard times, to seek solace in any way they can.

In "Glory Days", the high school jock and the high school babe look ruefully back upon their apparently blissful schooldays, when they were young and in demand, while the narrator looks at them both with a mix of amusement and pity, contemplating his own mortality. Both "Bobby Jean" and "No Surrender" explore – quite beautifully – the deep and long-lasting friendships that cannot be broken (the former believed to be about Springsteen's oldest sidekick Steve Van Zandt, then on the verge of leaving the E Street Band). "Cover Me" sees the narrator seeking to escape the rigours of modern life by immersing himself in the love of a good woman. "My Hometown" follows a 35-year-old father, the same age as Springsteen, who surveys his neighbourhood and finds a bleak post-industrial landscape; he reluctantly decides that he and his family have to leave town to find work. But Springsteen always avoids looking at the past through rose-tinted spectacles – the past was, as he reminds himself, one of danger and racial segregation: *"There were lots of fights/Between black and white/There was nothing you can do."* They aren't all sympathetic characters, though; many are pathetic male stereotypes who regard women purely as trophies. Some, like the priapic narrator of "I'm On Fire", or the roadworker in search of a child bride in "Working On The Highway", might be seen as predatory paedophiles. "Darlington County" is another morality tale, following young construction workers from the big city on the hunt for easy sex with smalltown teenage girls; the song ends with one of them finding God, the other being arrested. There's also the jilted lover of "Downbound Train", who appears to work his way through three different jobs before ending up in prison.

It is by some considerable distance his biggest album – yet Springsteen seems unconvinced of its greatness

Springsteen remains unconvinced of the album's greatness. "I put a lot of pressure on myself over a long period of time to reproduce the intensity of *Nebraska* on *Born In The USA*," he has said. "I never got it." He claimed that the title song and "My Hometown" fitted into the concept album he initially intended, but otherwise "it really didn't flesh out like I had hoped it would". And, despite this being Springsteen's biggest LP, few of its songs have become regulars in his set list, at least not in their bombastic album form. "Dancing In The Dark" was transformed into a solo acoustic guitar dirge before dropping from the setlist, as was "No Surrender" (which gained a brief revival in 2004 when John Kerry used it as an election anthem). Likewise, "Born In The USA" reverted to its *Nebraska*-style solo version in the late 1980s before dropping out of the setlist. After September 11, 2001 it was briefly revived, but radically recast as a kind of raga blues, with Springsteen ululating the lyrics while accompanying himself on a specially tuned 12-string guitar which he played, Ry Cooder-style, with a slide.

Throughout the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, Springsteen strenuously avoided using "Born In The USA" as a gung-ho anthem, undercutting its stridency and highlighting its protest song credentials. It suggests that, if he was once happy for his lyrical ambiguities to be freely interpreted, he is now in a position where he can be a little more forceful in nailing down his standpoint. Amazingly, it doesn't appear to have harmed his career one bit. ✪

BOSSFACTS

★ The video for "Glory Days" was filmed in a club called Maxwell's in Hoboken, NJ, part-owned by Frank Sinatra

★ Chrysler Motors are rumoured to have offered Springsteen $12m to use "Born In The USA" in an ad campaign. He refused, and they commissioned a soundalike pastiche instead, entitled "The Pride Is Back"

GLOBE PHOTOS/ALPHA

TUNNEL OF LOVE

A broken marriage, an uncomfortable reaction to superstardom, a deconstructed E Street Band… and Springsteen's most personal album yet. BY GAVIN MARTIN

9 OCTOBER 1987

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN might have been troubled by the mainstream perception of him created by *Born In The USA* but, initially, it didn't show. His next release, *Live/1975-85* [*see page 136-139*] was a five-record boxset that showcased Springsteen as all-purpose rock star icon, campaigning populist, onstage marathon man and even knockabout clown.

It was never likely, though, that the artist behind works as isolating and troubled as *Nebraska*, or as unflinching as *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, would be content pursuing, or maintaining, the superstar status that had followed in the wake of *Born In The USA*. By early 1987 the time had come to, at least temporarily, put Bruce Springsteen: The Legend, aside.

"I felt that a large audience is, by nature, transient," Springsteen later reflected. "If you depend on it too much it may distort what you do and who you are." So, retreating from the clamour of recent years and determined not to let popularity "blind (him) to the deeper resonances of (his) work", Springsteen began recording a series of songs in the garage of his home in Rumson, New Jersey. Synthesisers, guitar, keyboards and percussion instruments were the tools with which he set to work, creating compositions more frank and intimate than ever before. For the first time, too, he deliberately assumed a kind of auteur role, one betraying the influence of a favoured contemporary, and that season's most progressive

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Ain't Got You ★★★★
2 Tougher Than The Rest ★★★★★
3 All That Heaven Will Allow ★★★★★
4 Spare Parts ★★★★
5 Cautious Man ★★★★
6 Walk Like A Man ★★★★
7 Tunnel Of Love ★★★★★
8 Two Faces ★★★★
9 Brilliant Disguise ★★★★★
10 One Step Up ★★★★★
11 When You're Alone ★★★
12 Valentine's Day ★★★★

Released: October 9, 1987
Produced by: Jon Landau, Bruce Springsteen, Chuck Plotkin
Recorded in: New Jersey and at A&M Studios, Los Angeles, California
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (lead vocals, guitar, bass guitar, keyboards, sound effects, harmonica); Roy Bittan (piano on "Brilliant Disguise", synthesisers on "Tunnel Of Love"); Clarence Clemons (vocals on "When You're Alone"); Danny Federici (organ on "Tougher Than the Rest", "Spare Parts", "Two Faces", and "Brilliant Disguise"); Nils Lofgren (solo guitar on "Tunnel Of Love", vocals on "When You're Alone"); Patti Scialfa (vocals on "Tunnel of Love", "One Step Up" and "When You're Alone"); Garry Tallent (bass on "Spare Parts"); Max Weinberg (drums on "All That Heaven Will Allow", "Two Faces", and "When You're Alone"; percussion on "Tougher Than the Rest", "Spare Parts", "Walk Like a Man", "Tunnel Of Love", "Brilliant Disguise"); James Wood (harmonica on "Spare Parts").
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 1

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
TUNNEL OF LOVE

SIDE ONE
AIN'T GOT YOU
TOUGHER THAN THE REST
ALL THAT HEAVEN WILL ALLOW
SPARE PARTS
CAUTIOUS MAN
WALK LIKE A MAN
SIDE TWO
TUNNEL OF LOVE
TWO FACES
BRILLIANT DISGUISE
ONE STEP UP
WHEN YOU'RE ALONE
VALENTINE'S DAY
CBS
CBS 460270 1
(SE)
Produced by Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau, Chuck Plotkin
Recorded and Engineered by Toby Scott
Mixed by Bob Clearmountain

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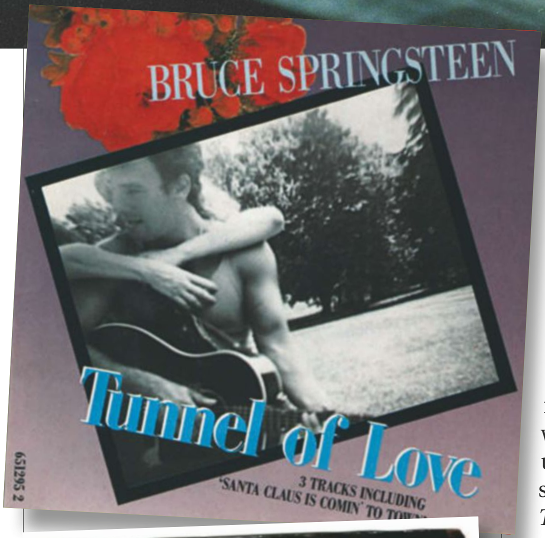
MCPS/BIEM
℗ 1987 Bruce Springsteen
1. AIN'T GOT YOU (2.06) (B. Springsteen)
2. TOUGHER THAN THE REST (4.35) (B. Springsteen)
3. ALL THAT HEAVEN WILL ALLOW (2.30) (B. Springsteen)
4. SPARE PARTS (3.39) (B. Springsteen)
5. CAUTIOUS MAN (3.56) (B. Springsteen)
6. WALK LIKE A MAN (3.37) (B. Springsteen)
Produced by Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau, Chuck Plotkin
(1-6) Zomba Music Pub. Ltd.
Original sound recording made by Bruce Springsteen



HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

mainstream pop architect, Prince.

In the text accompanying *Songs*, his anthology of lyrics, Springsteen explained that *Tunnel Of Love*'s striking change of pace, mood and emotional landscape was born of his desire to reintroduce himself to his fans as a "songwriter". Or, to put it another way, it was time to strip away the protection of the band and get personal.

The first sessions for a studio follow-up to *Born In The USA* had found Springsteen fronting a country trio and, though those were soon abandoned, the exercise undoubtedly had its effect on the new songs. In the journey of Springsteen's career, *Tunnel Of Love* sits on a cusp, its diversity providing pointers to the paths he'd pursue over the next two decades.

He had not completely forsaken his past. Loners, outcasts and soul-searchers had long been commonplace in Springsteen's canon, and the key to the emotional turmoil he would now explore was to be found in the protagonist of *The River*'s "Stolen Car"; a man confronting angels, demons and a disintegrating love affair in which he has begun to feel like an imposter.

But if early gossip suggested that *Tunnel Of Love* would be a return to the bare-bones primitivism of *Nebraska*, the lead single, "Brilliant Disguise", quickly corrected the rumours. The E Street Band Trio – Roy Bittan, Danny Federici and Max Weinberg – traced an ominous Baion Latin beat, creating an emotional edge that harked back to Leiber & Stoller's classic Drifters period. Lyrically, though, "Brilliant Disguise" was "Save The Last Dance For Me" injected with the curdled possessiveness and paranoia of "You've Lost That Lovin Feelin'". Springsteen later admitted feeling uncomfortable with how blatantly "Dancing In The Dark", written at Jon Landau's request, had courted the pop market. This time there was to be no such dilemma. "Brilliant Disguise" masterfully set the mood for the album that followed, one that located darkness squarely in the hearts of the songs' characters and their relationships.

It wasn't hard to draw analogies to Springsteen's personal life. His 1985

BOSSFACTS

★ ***Tunnel Of Love* shared both its title, and its concept of love as a fairground ride, with a key track from Dire Strait's 1980 multi-million seller, *Making Movies***

★ **The Schiffer family of Point Pleasant, NJ provided the roller coaster backing vocals on "Tunnel Of Love"**

marriage to B-list Hollywood actress Julianne Phillips had seemed an unlikely match from the start, and public pronouncements on their affair had been non-existent. So when *Tunnel Of Love* opened with the gleefully – and angrily – self-referential "Ain't Got You", obvious conclusions were drawn. Here, Springsteen presented himself as a one-man band, a Bo Diddley/Billy Boy Arnold-style millionaire (a rare breed!) with possessions, women and the world in general falling at his feet, still bemoaning the gaping lack of love in his kingdom of plenty. The lyrics were funny and could have been delivered for laughs. Instead, they seethed with a palpable vitriol and desperation.

"Walk Like A Man", meanwhile, was played directly to Douglas Springsteen ("This one's for you, Pops!") when Bruce's father and mother attended a show in Palo Alto barely six months after the record's release, and was the most potent and revealing of his father songs. The steady drumbeat alludes gently, but unmistakeably, to "Racing In The Streets" and, in a twist that could hardly be more autobiographical, the handsome groom and his bride step into a *"long black limousine/For that mystery ride"*. "Walk Like A Man" contained one of the sweetest, simplest and most heartbreaking melody lines in his songbook, but the wedding bells of a childhood memory struck a note of gloom. Recalling his mother dragging him to the local church to see a couple embark on a new life together, he ponders if they *"would they ever look so happy again?"* The *"long black limousine"* that awaits appears more like a hearse than a wedding car.

Signs that *Tunnel Of Love* was the product of a marriage on the rocks were everywhere. In "Spare Parts", a single mother, deserted by her husband, takes her wedding dress to the pawnshop and walks out with some *"cold hard cash"*. But *Tunnel Of Love*'s greatness also sprang from its author's impressive control and vision as an arranger. Eschewing the full band sound of *Born In The USA*, Springsteen deployed what was often effectively a deconstructed E Street Band and played the synths, keyboard and guitar parts himself. Though completed in three weeks, *Tunnel* was no rush job: time has proved that Springsteen's strategy resulted in some of the most delicate and artfully constructed work of his career. For instance, "All That Heaven Will Allow", one of several songs that both drew on and subverted the Catholic scriptures of his youth, found Springsteen toying with a sort of electro minimalism that suggested Kraftwerk coming down the New Jersey Turnpike. The late Danny Federici never contributed a more telling or beautifully etched elegy than the synth line that sealed "Tougher Than The Rest", a tender and resigned gospel prayer that could have come out of Otis Redding's hard-loving handbook. Longtime accomplice Steve Van Zandt remained absent from the ranks, however, and Clarence Clemons' sole contribution was a backing vocal as part of the harmony trio on "When You're Alone" – a bold use of E Street band resources which would be explored in future releases, not least on *Working On A Dream*.

The focus, though, locked unstintingly on Springsteen, as he subverted his macho image by exploring again and again issues of male frailty, weakness and identity. *Tunnel Of Love*'s songs are filled with snapshots of infidelity and licentiousness: a casual glance from a girl across the bar in "One Step Up"; a leering fat guy handing out the tickets in the title track.

"One Step Up" with its chilly acoustic guitar backdrop is, with the significant addition of Patti Scialfa's backing vocals, a Springsteen solo track. The images – of a house with a dying furnace and a car that refuses to start – speak to a relationship bereft of spark. Leonard Cohen is referenced in a bird that refuses to sing. The spiky guitar spindles offer cold comfort, an icy embrace.

A similar uncertainty and fear loom large in the noir fable "Cautious Man", forestalled only by the sacramental image that completes the song. The title character Bill Horton, whose tattooed knuckles recall Robert Mitchum's murderous preacher in *The Night Of The Hunter*, finds fleeting redemption as he brushes the hair from his sleeping wife's face in God's *"fallen light"*. "Two Faces" pivots on a deceptive acoustic strum, but plays out as a bedsit blues, with broken bottle percussion and a Farfisa organ segue which, for all its peppiness, ultimately offers a sneering rebuke.

In much the same way, the key rock tracks on *Tunnel Of Love* matched bruised and agonised music to brutal imagery. "Spare Parts" unleashed a world of pain where sex is reduced to a mechanical process, devoid of pleasure and producing the broken hearts which *"keep the world turning"*, while Springsteen's delivery was pure street corner preacher; vibrant, incensed and incandescent. The title cut offered a cynical vision of Love's ride – a trip on an amusement park attraction that quickly turns into a freakshow showdown between *"Just the three of us – you, me and all that stuff we're so scared of…"*

The promise of a happy ending seems to be held out by "Valentine's Day". Or does it? In an audacious twist on Rodgers and Hart's "My Funny Valentine", the narrator aches for a loving reunion. But at the same time, his lonely, wild animal instinct (*"The timberwolf in the pines"*) lingers and, prefiguring the death dream of "My Beautiful Reward" on *Lucky Town* four years down the line, the song concludes in a scarred image of death and love entwined. *Tunnel Of Love* was certainly an album of reckoning – but any sense of reconciliation it offered was hard-won.

Springsteen insisted the album was "not literally autobiographical". But much of the album – right down to its simple, almost apologetic, cover dedication "To Juli", suggested otherwise. Small surprise, then, that by the time the *Tunnel Of Love* tour reached Europe in 1988, the not-exactly-secret affair between Springsteen and future wife Patti Scialfa had become the focus of intense tabloid speculation. ✪

***Tunnel Of Love* sits on a cusp, its diversity providing pointers to the paths Springsteen would pursue over the next two decades**

THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ "*Tunnel Of Love* is surely a return to old habits, a chastened, harsh and often surprisingly humble record from a man for whom the world is his oyster."
STEVE SUTHERLAND, MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 10, 1987

★ "This is one of Bruce Springsteen's finest albums and easily his best this decade."
NEIL TAYLOR, NME, OCTOBER 10, 1987

LUCKY TOWN/ HUMAN TOUCH

After a long hiatus, Springsteen returns with a new family, a notable absence of E Streeters and two albums of maturity and contentment.

BY ADAM SWEETING

31 MARCH 1992

THE GARGANTUAN success of *Born In The USA* and its accompanying mega-tours epitomised what Fred Goodman, author of *The Mansion On The Hill*, called "the head-on collision of rock and commerce". Having been the flag-waver for rock music as a route to liberation and artistic self-exploration, Springsteen had become the Coca-Cola of rock'n'roll. If he'd been a bank (and he probably could have turned himself into one at that point), they'd have described him as "too big to fail".

In his book, a dissection of the terrible things business can do to art, Goodman makes some barbed observations about Springsteen's mid-'80s commercial apotheosis. He describes how the team around the artist, not least his hyperbolic biographer Dave Marsh, worked to present his career as not just a commercial triumph, but "a story of unparalleled artistic and moral achievement in which there were no compromises or contradictions." Bruce had travelled beyond mere rock stardom into beatification.

At least Springsteen had the decency to exhibit fallibly human reactions to all this. He'd blundered into his disastrous marriage to Julianne Phillips, and the bitter fallout had generated the bonus (for fans, at any rate) of the superb *Tunnel Of Love* [*see previous feature, starting page 64*]. But now, four-and-a-half years had elapsed before Springsteen released new material, a period which evidently involved him in some serious readjustment of his attitudes to his private life and his public persona. By the time *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* were ready for release in the spring of 1992, Bruce was married to Patti Scialfa, had two kids, was living in California, and had summarily dismissed the E Street Band.

Why Springsteen decided to

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

HUMAN TOUCH

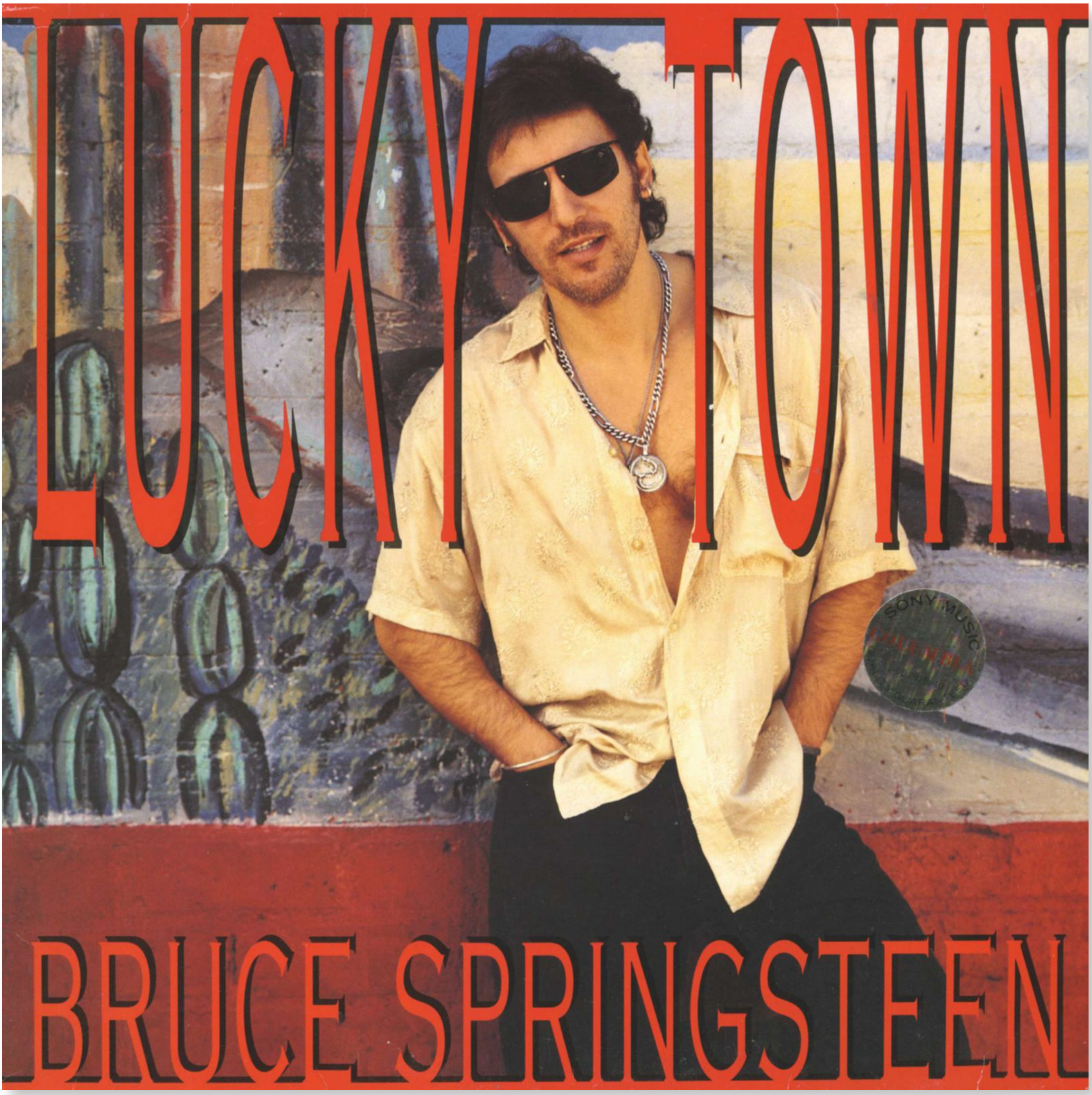
1 Human Touch ★★★★★
2 Soul Driver ★★★★
3 57 Channels (And Nothin' On) ★★★★★
4 Cross My Heart ★★
5 Gloria's Eyes ★★★
6 With Every Wish ★★★
7 Roll of the Dice ★★★
8 Real World ★★★★
9 All Or Nothin' At All ★★★
10 Man's Job ★★★★★
11 I Wish I Were Blind ★★★
12 The Long Goodbye ★★★
13 Real Man ★★
14 Pony Boy ★★★★

Released: March 31, 1992
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau, Chuck Plotkin, Roy Bittan
Recorded at: A&M Studios, Los Angeles. Additional recording at Soundworks West, Oceanway Studios, Westlake and the Record Plant
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (guitar & vocals); Roy Bittan (keyboards); Randy Jackson (bass); Jeff Porcaro (drums & percussion); Patti Scialfa, Sam Moore, Bobby King, Bobby Hatfield (vocals); David Sancious (organ); Ian McLagan (piano); Tim Pierce (guitar); Mark Isham (muted trumpet); Douglas Lunn (bass); Kurt Wortman (drums/dumbek); Michael Fisher (percussion)
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 2

LUCKY TOWN

1 Better Days ★★★★★
2 Lucky Town ★★★★
3 Local Hero ★★★★★
4 If I Should Fall Behind ★★★★
5 Leap Of Faith ★★★
6 The Big Muddy ★★★★
7 Living Proof ★★★★★
8 Book Of Dreams ★★★
9 Souls Of The Departed ★★★★
10 My Beautiful Reward ★★★★★

Released: March 31, 1992
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen with Jon Landau and Chuck Plotkin
Additional production by: Roy Bittan on "Leap Of Faith", "The Big Muddy", "Living Proof"
Recorded at: Thrill Hill Recording, New Jersey. Additional recording and mixing at A&M Studios
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, various instruments); Gary Mallabar (drums); Ian McLagan (Hammond organ); Roy Bittan (keyboards, keyboard bass); Randy Jackson (bass); Lisa Lowell, Patti Scialfa, Soozie Tyrell (backing vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 2; US 3


LUCKY TOWN
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
SONY MUSIC

HUMAN TOUCH
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
HUMAN TOUCH
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
1 Human Touch
2 Soul Driver
3 57 Channels (And Nothin' On)
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by Bruce Springsteen
d by Bruce Springsteen
h Jon Landau and Chuck Plotkin
tional production by Roy Bittan
COLUMBIA

release the two discs simultaneously has never been entirely clear – surely he can't have been that infatuated by the example of Guns N' Roses' *Use Your Illusion I* and *II* six months earlier – but they represented two distinct songwriting phases. He began work on the *Human Touch* material in 1989, and the process continued into 1991. He was writing a lot of songs, but seemed to lack the kind of overriding theme that had shaped benchmark discs like *The River* or *Tunnel Of Love*. He'd reached an impasse when he happened to hear Bob Dylan's "Series Of Dreams" on his car stereo, which by some process of artistic osmosis spurred him to write "Living Proof", about the birth of his son, Evan. Springsteen found himself on a songwriting roll, and ended up writing all the songs for *Lucky Town* in a comparatively rapid two-month burst.

The difference is audible in the tone and pace of the material, if not in the recording and production, which gave both discs an efficient if somewhat impersonal sheen. A looser, rougher feel might have gone some way to ameliorating the more hostile of the critics' mixed reactions, particularly in the case of *Human Touch*. But across the two albums there was plenty of evidence to counteract the notion that Springsteen had hit some sort of creative dead zone. When the four-disc *Tracks* compilation appeared in 1998, it contained an additional swathe of material from the *Human Touch* sessions, in many cases superior to the songs Springsteen had picked for the album.

As for *Lucky Town*, its 10 songs, running the gamut from the surging declarations of "Better Days" or "Leap Of Faith" to the mystical blues of "Big Muddy" and the hallucinatory "My Beautiful Reward", add up to one of the more pleasingly proportioned statements in the Springsteen repertoire. The writing feels confident and focused, and the material fits together comfortably as an album, all doubtless the result of being written in a defined period of time.

Human Touch – in effect a compilation culled from a big bucket of songs – could hardly help suffering by comparison. Even a glance at the timings told its own story. *Human Touch* contained 14 songs and lasted 59 minutes, while the svelte *Lucky Town* clocked in at a whisker under 40 minutes. Not for the first time in music history, more proved to be less, and once you started bumping into *Human Touch* pieces like "Cross My Heart", "With Every Wish" or "Real Man", never destined to become the brightest stars in the Brucean cosmos, it felt like being adrift without a compass.

But the news from *Human Touch* was far from all bad. It rolled down the slipway with the title track, a dramatic anthem designed to build towards the panoramic change-up in the middle. Its plea for *"a little of that human touch"* and warning that all relationships have risks attached was plausible enough, though the message was almost dwarfed by the roar of drums and guitars. In place of the E Street Band, from which only keyboardsman Roy Bittan survived, Springsteen had recruited Randy Jackson on bass and Jeff Porcaro on drums, while playing all the guitars himself. The playing consequently exuded power and finesse, but had been stripped of familiar E Street signatures like saxophones and glockenspiels.

The standout tracks were the ones which allowed a glimmer of spontaneity or humour to seep into the mix. "57 Channels (And Nothin' On)" was a sly satire on a culture grinning brainlessly while it drowned itself in mediocrity, with Springsteen deadpanning a tale of a man trying to please his lover with technological baubles: *"Home entertainment was my baby's wish/So I hopped into town for a satellite dish."* However, he was poorly rewarded with, *"A note that said 'Bye-bye John/Our love is 57 channels and nothin' on'."*

Another highlight was "Man's Job", a sweet and sexy ode to (we would hope) Scialfa, with Springsteen presenting himself as the mature, dependable suitor seeing off all the flashy Lothario types – *"Takin' care of you darlin'/Ain't for one of the boys."* Musically, it was a captivating mix of soul and janglerock, with counterpoint vocals from Sam Moore (of Sam & Dave) and Bobby King, and featuring a luscious Ventures-style retro-twang guitar solo. It hinted at the soul, gospel and surf music Springsteen had grown up with, while also serving as a reminder of his gifts as a writer of pop songs, often overshadowed by the sombre, soul-searching elements of his work.

Springsteen returned to the rock-soul interface for "Real World", an exhilaratingly pacey saga of a man sick of wallowing in *"hurt and self-pity"* and taking *"the hard road outta heartbreak city"*. It was the force of the playing, and Springsteen's spirited vocal sparring with Sam Moore, that generated all the momentum, and it peaked in a molten guitar solo that must have stripped the varnish off his fretboard. Both this and "Roll Of The Dice" were co-written by Bruce and Roy Bittan, and they shared a similar theme of throwing caution to the wind and taking one last chance. But if Springsteen's editing antennae had been in full working order he'd surely have dropped "Dice", which was little more than "Real World"'s runtish poor relation.

Likewise, it was hard to see the need for "I Wish I Were Blind", a pointless variation on the soul standard "I'd Rather Go Blind", while "The Long Goodbye" sounded like a riff the musicians had been kicking around in the studio to which Bruce subsequently added lyrics. Especially irksome was "Real Man", for which original E Streeter David Sancious had been recalled to add cheesy end-of-the-pier organ while Springsteen tried unconvincingly to revisit his teens with lyrics like *"took my baby to a picture show"* and *"me and my girl Saturday night"*. At least the final track, "Pony Boy", reverted to the virtues of brevity and simplicity.

Despite several fine tracks, *Human Touch* failed to gel as an album, and in its weaker moments found Springsteen falling back on clichés-by-rote in place of inspiration. Warning bells start to clang when he lapses into his cod-pastoral mode, as if he's making a clumsy attempt at medieval love poetry, and "With Every Wish" and "I Wish I Were Blind" were both specimens of this tendency. Yet there's evidence that the album could have been transformed by some judicious pruning and song substitutions. The material that surfaced on *Tracks* suggested Springsteen had found it difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff (throughout his career, albums had suffered delays while he struggled to make sense of the vast number of songs he'd recorded). With hindsight, it's hard to believe he couldn't have made room for such powerful pieces as "Leavin' Train"," When The Lights Go Out", "Sad Eyes" or the ingenious post-Darwinian treatise "Part Man, Part Monkey". Whip those in, chuck out "Real Man", "The Long Goodbye" and a handful more, and the critics might have been hailing another masterpiece.

As it was, *Human Touch*'s failings were thrown into sharp relief by the concision and coherence of *Lucky Town*. The urgency of *Lucky Town*'s recording was emphasised by the fact that Springsteen played most of the instruments himself, using only drummer Gary Mallabar as a regular sideman and drafting in backing vocalists and Ian McLagan and Roy Bittan on keyboards if required. For a disc whose theme might loosely be described as "world's biggest rock star takes stock and

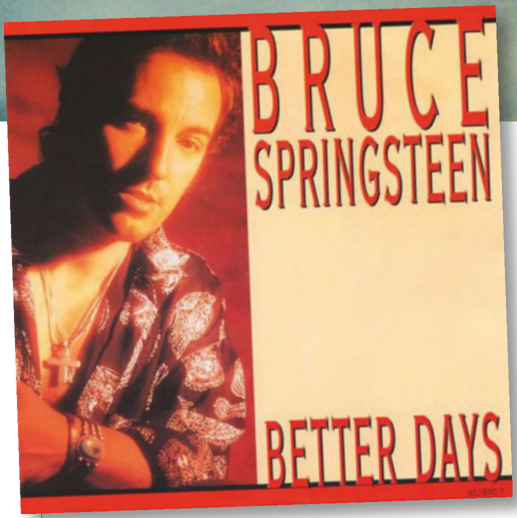
THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ "*Human Touch* offers us a glimpse at the real Bruce these past few years, sitting in his T-shirt and underpants, bored, flicking peanuts at the screen. It also points to his utter failure of imagination."
DAVID STUBBS, MELODY MAKER, APRIL 4, 1992

★ "Listening to *Human Touch* is like being harangued across the garden fence by your boring neighbour who wants to tell you about his geraniums and seed packets and the rubbish road movie he got out on video last week."
STUART BAILIE, NME, APRIL 4, 1992

★ "*Lucky Town* is the work of a man who has grown up with rock'n'roll, but has seen it replaced as Holy Grail by marriage and fatherhood. For Springsteen, this album is – as its final track has it – 'My Beautiful Reward'."
PATRICK HUMPHRIES, VOX, APRIL, 1992

★ "On *Lucky Town*, Bruce comes across like a suburban American leafing through the lexicon of Beautiful South lyrics while strumming a guitar with the amps turned to half-volume in case the neighbours hear."
EVERETT TRUE, MELODY MAKER, APRIL 4, 1992



Across the two albums there was plenty of evidence to counteract the notion that Springsteen had hit some sort of creative dead zone…

counts his blessings", Springsteen came up with the perfect opening track in "Better Days". Strong, stormy and resolute, it drew a picture of a man coming to terms with ideas of giving and sharing after having devoted himself obsessively to his stellar career. He admitted it might be difficult for listeners to feel too sorry for a rich blighter like himself, but nonetheless there had been a gaping hole in his life (*"It's a sad man my friend who's livin' in his own skin/ And can't stand the company"*). And now, *"better days are shining through"*.

In "Living Proof", the song that had pulled the trigger on the whole album, Springsteen clawed as deep into himself as he ever had in evoking the transformation he'd experienced through family life and fatherhood. Imagery of anguish and fiery rebirth drenched the song like blazing phosphorus: *"I crawled so deep into some kind of darkness/Lookin' to burn out every trace of who I'd been"*; *"There were no keys no guards/Just one frightened man and some old shadows for bars"*; *"…Life is just a house of cards/As fragile as each and every breath"*. And, proving that an Italian-Irish Catholic upbringing is with you for life, he experienced his new-found state as evidence of God-given grace – *"Looking for a little bit of God's mercy/ I found living proof."*

Themes of love, faith and family wound their way through many of the songs. "Book Of Dreams" was a mirage-like acount of an idyllic wedding day (and a striking contrast to the cynicism of "Walk Like A Man" on *Tunnel Of Love*), while "If I Should Fall Behind" was a marriage vow set to music. In the eerie "Souls Of The Departed", Springsteen refracted the deaths of an American soldier and a young gang victim in East LA through the fragile prism of his own new-found fatherhood.

"Local Hero" offered welcome respite from all this high emotion and holy ecstasy, with its mood of droll self-deprecation. Anybody who's seen a Springsteen performance will be well aware of his flair for knockabout comedy, a trait he indulged at length in the live shows that followed the release of *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, but humour is often difficult to find in his songs. Here, however, there was a streak of black comedy in his allegorical tale

OF A MAN selling his soul for fame – *"First they made me the king and then they made me pope/Then they brought the rope."*

He closed the album on a mystical note with "My Beautiful Reward", which seemed to be part Biblical allegory and, with its images of a bird-like being soaring over *"the river's silent edge"*, part near-death experience. The clarity and simplicity of the words lent them a resonance that seemed to reach far beyond the song's immediate circumstances as the final track on another Bruce Springsteen album. *Lucky Town* enjoyed a far more favourable reception than *Human Touch*, though it has never been ranked in the upper reaches of his catalogue. On Springsteen's own personal scoreboard, I'd bet it rates very high indeed. ✪

SNAP/REX

THE GHOST OF TOM JOAD

Unemployed steelworker? Speed-cooking Mexican? Bank robber, border patrolman, rent boy? As forensic protest singer, Springsteen becomes the stark voice of the disenfranchised. BY ANDREW MUELLER

★ 21 NOVEMBER 1995

BY THE TIME *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* was released, Springsteen would have been long-accustomed to scoffs about the hypocrisy of flaunting the blueness of his collar. *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* nevertheless seemed a monumental temptation of hubris even by Springsteen's standards: the world famous rock'n'roll titan, comfortably richer than God, explicitly attempting communion with the penniless, shoeless, ragged-trousered protagonist of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes Of Wrath*, fleeing the depression-parched dustbowl of Oklahoma in search of menial toil in California. Hoping, perhaps, to pick oranges on a farm doubtless rather smaller than Springsteen's backyard. It could scarcely have seemed less gauche a conceit if Croesus himself had released an album of Blind Alfred Reed covers, strummed on a solid gold lute strung with hair from a unicorn's tail.

Yet it is perfectly believeable that Springsteen felt a certain – and genuine – kinship with the hapless Joad at around this point. Though Springsteen's personal circumstances were certainly more comfortable than Joad's, both were men unmoored, uncertain, even emanating an aroma of desperation as they searched and scrabbled for their next decent day's work. For Springsteen, it was over a decade since *Born In The USA* had made him a superstar. The time since had been the least productive of his life, spawning only the reflective divorce album *Tunnel Of Love* in 1987, and the double-shot of 1992's *Lucky Town* and *Human Touch* (in a 2009 *Rolling Stone* interview, Springsteen shrugged off the '90s as "A lost period. I didn't do a lot of work"). He had reached his mid-forties, and fallen out with the band that had helped him to the summit. He would have been more than human not to consider the possibility he'd blown it, and that all that lay before him was a long, undignified, even Joad-like plod through the wilderness.

In fairness to Springsteen, he has always been respectful of the disparity between his bank balance and that of the characters that populate his songs (cf "Better Days" on *Lucky Town*, some of whose

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 The Ghost Of Tom Joad ★★★★★
2 Straight Time ★★★★
3 Highway 29 ★★★
4 Youngstown ★★★★★
5 Sinaloa Cowboys ★★★★★
6 The Line ★★★★
7 Balboa Park ★★★
8 Dry Lightning ★★★
9 The New Timer ★★★★
10 Across The Border ★★★★
11 Galveston Bay ★★★
12 My Best Was Never Good Enough ★★★★

Released: November 21, 1995
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Chuck Plotkin
Recorded at: Thrill Hill, New Jersey
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar, keyboards, harmonica); Danny Federici (keyboards); Gary Mallaber (drums); Marty Rifkin (pedal steel); Garry Tallent (bass); Jim Hanson (bass); Soozie Tyrell (violin); Chuck Plotkin (keyboards); Jennifer Condos (bass); Lisa Lowell and Patty Scialfa (backing vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 16; US 11

bruce springsteen
the ghost of tom joad

side one
the ghost of tom joad
straight time
highway 29
youngstown
sinaloa cowboys
the line
side two
balboa park
dry lightning
the new timer
across the border
galveston bay
my best was never good enough
PRODUCED BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND CHUCK PLOTKIN
RECORDED AND MIXED BY TOBY SCOTT
COLUMBIA
bruce springsteen
the ghost of tom joad
straight time
highway 29
side one
C 67484
springsteen
balboa park 3:19
dry lightning 3:30
the new timer 5:45
across the border 5:24
galveston bay 5:04
my best was never good enough 2:00
ghost of tom joad
COLUMBIA
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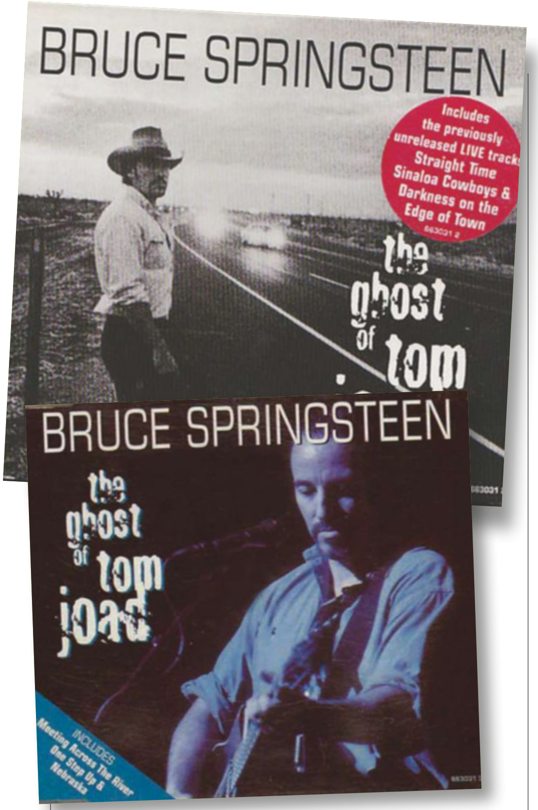
lyrics could have been lines of Steinbeck dialogue). The other important cue for *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* was a single released by Springsteen around a year earlier. "Streets Of Philadelphia", written for Jonathan Demme's film, *Philadelphia*, was peculiar, for Springsteen. It shuffled and mumbled like the doomed drifter it depicted, rendering a portrait in smudges and blurs rather than the sharp strokes that usually defined Springsteen's characters.

Springsteen had made wilfully downbeat music before – most notably 1982's *Nebraska*. *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* has much in common with that exercise in lo-fi bleakness. Both albums are musically minimal; though *Tom Joad* is properly – even intricately – arranged, and features performers other than Springsteen, each track does no more than it must to prop up the melodies, which are modest, unimposing, muttered rather than roared. Both albums are focused on those characters who wearily trudge, outstretched thumbs ignored, the hard shoulders of the highways exuberantly driven by Springsteen's more stereotypical creations. And aside from his 1973 debut, *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ*, they're the only two Springsteen albums whose cover does not feature a picture of Springsteen. The *Tom Joad* artwork, by Eric Dinyer, features an off-focus rear view of a naked, pompadoured figure which, granted, might be Springsteen – but even if it is, it's a study in reticence compared to the full-frontal portraits which generally adorn his records.

The title of *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* is important. What interests Springsteen is not the actual sharecroppers and carpet-baggers of whom Steinbeck wrote, but their modern-day equivalents. The Great Depression of the 1930s has a mythology – and, in the popular imagination at least, a redemptive conclusion in Franklin D Roosevelt's New Deal. The recessions of the modern age have neither, and Springsteen acts swiftly to emphasise the contemporary nature of his concerns. The first two lines of the title track, which opens the album with a signal honk of protest singer's harmonica, is bald Steinbeckian pastiche: *"Men walkin' 'long the railroad tracks/Goin' someplace there's no goin' back."* The third, however – *"Highway patrol choppers comin' up over the ridge"* – punches home the point that this is happening right now, right where he and his audience live. The snarl of *"Welcome to the new world order"* also places the song firmly in



the present: at the time, the phrase was still principally associated with the attempts of George HW Bush to establish a post-Cold War epoch of universal progress and prosperity.

The sleeve credits of *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* acknowledge debts to source material more recent than Steinbeck: John Ford's 1940 film of *The Grapes Of Wrath*, a couple of *Los Angeles Times* articles exploring the netherworld inhabited by illegal immigrants to the United States from Mexico, the autobiography of crusading lawyer Morris Dees (co-founder of the Southern Poverty Law Centre). Probably most importantly, there was American journalist Dale Maharidge's *Journey To Nowhere*, researched in the early 1980s, which illuminated the lives of America's modern underclasses. From these chronicles of hard travelling on the wrong side of the tracks, Springsteen chose his cast: the unemployed, the desperate, the disregarded and adrift.

The music in which he shrouded them is the most consistently mournful of any album in the Springsteen canon, every song a ballad, every vocal a sigh (even *Nebraska* opened its throttle occasionally, for "Reason To Believe" and "Johnny 99"). Seven of the 12 tracks are performed entirely by Springsteen, on vocals, guitar and the gloomy mists of keyboard, evocative of

BOSSFACTS

★ Springsteen toured solo for *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, which was something of a culture shock for his audiences. He opened many of the concerts with a request for silence, adding, "Don't make me come down there and smack you around – it'll mess with my man-of-the-people image"

★ Springsteen would later write an introduction for a new edition of Dale Maharidge's *Journey To Nowhere*, made necessary by the interest generated by *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* – he may therefore at least claim that this album improved the economic circumstances of at least one American

"Streets Of Philadelphia", which define the album's sound. It's a general rule of Springsteen's music, observable as recently as the title cut of *Magic*, that backdrops of keyboard are portents of doom. When other musicians – including E Street Band veterans Danny Federici and Garry Tallent – contribute, they do so from a long distance in the background. To a degree matched by few other Springsteen albums – perhaps only *Nebraska* and 2005's *Devils & Dust*, the latter of which contained several songs originally written at around this time – *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* is a vehicle for voices: Springsteen's own, and the usually unheard ones of those for whom he was singing.

The Ghost Of Tom Joad is obviously intended as a protest record, but it's indicative of what an unusual, fretful protest singer Springsteen is, when he is one. Though various aspects of the album recall such trenchant troubadours as Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Phil Ochs, Tom Paxton and Steve Earle, there are none of the anthems or slogans with which those singers roused their audiences. Though Springsteen's love songs are usually rooted in a blind faith in the storybook ending – witness the offers of eternal blazing devotion made to Mary in "Thunder Road" and Wendy in "Born To Run" – his political writing has always been resolutely realistic. He sings of love as it ought to be, and – on this album especially – about everything else as it is. The implicit assumption of these songs is that the truth is so bitter that describing it counts as protest enough.

Though all the writing on *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* is tremendous, the words working overtime to compensate for the deliberate lack of kinetic potence in the music – it crests on the fourth and fifth tracks. "Youngstown" and "Sinaloa Cowboys" are two of Springsteen's most brilliantly realised songs, each a masterclass in telling a long story by telling a short one. "Youngstown", named after the fading Ohio steel burg, compresses into four minutes America's late 20th century industrial decline and imperial bloat. A redundant furnace-stoker surveys the wreckage of his factory and the town that went down with it, and reminds America of what it couldn't have done without him (*"These mills they built the tanks and bombs/That won this country's wars"*), however ungrateful it is (*"Once I made you rich enough/Rich enough to forget my name"*). "Sinaloa Cowboys", a knelling, Marty Robbins-ish melodrama, reports from the intersection of two of modern America's perennial angsts: immigration from south of the Rio Grande, and drug trafficking, as experienced by the Rosales brothers from Mexico, who end up cooking speed *"for the men from Sinaloa"* on a deserted chicken ranch in Fresno County, California, with fatal consequences for one of them.

These songs are made by Springsteen's meticulous attention to detail and old-fashioned research. He – and anyone listening – couldn't know without looking it up that the *"Jenny"* to whom "Youngstown" is addressed isn't some mythical sister to Mary and Wendy, but the immense blast furnace of

The most consistently mournful of any album in the Springsteen canon, every song a ballad, every vocal a sigh

Youngstown's Sheet & Tube company, which was nicknamed Jeannette (it was demolished in 1997). He – and his listeners – wouldn't get all they might out of "Sinaloa Cowboys" without knowing that the Mexican state of Sinaloa is the heartland of the country's most ferocious and profitable drug cartel (the gang's boss, Joaquín Guzmán, recently escaped from prison and, in 2011, was estimated by Forbes magazine to be the 701st richest man in the world). Springsteen is even pretty good on the technicalities of drug manufacture. The volatile hydriodic acid mentioned in "Sinaloa Cowboys" did indeed start being used in the 1980s in California to reduce (legal, with prescription) ephidrine to (illegal) methamphetamine.

Given that so much of Springsteen's work is vexed by the capricious fates that make one man rich and another poor, it's little wonder that he wrings nearly this entire album from the border between the United States and Mexico, one of few places where the Third World directly abuts the First. Indeed, it's kind of surprising that it took him so long to get around to it. His attention on the region may have been focused by his sojourn in Los Angeles in the early 1990s. He's a bank robber hightailing it to the Sierra Madre in "Highway 29", a conflicted border patrolman in "The Line", a balloon-swallowing smuggler turned rent boy in "Balboa Park". It doesn't work out well for any of them, and the demise of the subject of the last of these is especially emblematic, clattered by a speeding police car – in Springsteen's universe, the automobile is usually an escape from the inevitable, not the deliverer of it.

Tough going though *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* is, it's still a Springsteen record, so a couple of glimmers of the optimism that animate him are discernible in the murk – tellingly, however, they're towards the end of the album, the odds against the happy ending by now stacked high. "Across The Border" is a sketch of a yearning émigré preparing for his first journey north, where *"Sweet blossoms fill the air/Pastures of gold and green/Roll down into cool clear waters"*. It's an update of the classic hobo fantasy "Big Rock Candy Mountain", shorn of its whimsy, and an obvious echo of "Meeting Across The River" from *Born To Run* – an earlier collection of the lies men tell themselves when they've just bet daunting stakes. "Galveston Bay" has a body count of two, but it also has a definitively Springstonian redemption. The white man contemplating revenge killing sheaths his knife, goes home to his wife, then goes off to work.

The closing track, the brief, resigned adieu "My Best Was Never Good Enough", appears, at first listen, askew. It sounds a straightforward statement of romantic disappointment, maybe something that didn't make it onto *Tunnel Of Love*. Springsteen slurs a sequence of clichéd affirmations, none of which he has, apparently, been able to live up to – *"A quitter never wins, and a winner never quits,"* and so on. As he checks them off, he grows sarcastic, contemptuous – *"The early bird catches the fuckin' worm… stupid is as stupid does, and all the rest of that shit."* And you remember where they make the movies and write the books and sing the songs that parrot these parables of uplift and self-improvement, and you grasp the identity of the *"pretty baby"* before whom Springsteen is abasing himself on this song, and throughout this extraordinary album: America. ✪

THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ **"Springsteen is writing beautifully once more, splicing dialogue and setting his characters in monumental scenes."**
STUART BAILIE, VOX, FEB 1996

★ **"Springsteen's voice and acoustic guitar illuminate how the outside forces of chance and fate shape personal destiny in such a way that leaves you with a lump in the throat. This is an incredibly poignant group of songs."**
MAT SMITH, MELODY MAKER, NOVEMBER 18, 1995

GETTY/WIRE IMAGE

'I DIDN'T WANT TO BE SOME 50-YEAR-OLD GUY OUT THERE WITH THE BOYS. IT WAS GOING TO BE BORING. AND KINDA TRAGIC'

Playing solo for the first time, Springsteen honours GAVIN MARTIN with one of his frankest interviews ever. To be discussed: maturity, gay iconography, the problem of socks in photographs, sex, drugs and – of course – the enduring, transcendent power of rock'n'roll

TAKEN FROM
NME
MARCH 9 | 1996

PENNIE SMITH

HE'LL BE REMEMBERED as the most unbounded performer in rock'n'roll history. His records took you inside a world of naked honesty and passionate conviction and his marathon shows were founded on deep audience empathy. But surely there must have been something else – some tough-bastard instinct – to get him where he wanted to be, to make him The Boss?

Bruce Springsteen laughs – partly in amusement, partly in protest. "The Boss was an idiotic nickname. It's the bane of my entire career. I've learned to live with it but I've hated it, y'know. Basically it was a casual thing. Somebody said it when the paychecks came out at the end of the month and then it ended up being this stupid thing – in my mind anyway. But, hey, so it goes.

"The thing is, I believed when I was young. I was a serious young man, I had serious ideas about rock music. I believed it was a serious thing, I believed it should also be fun – dancing, screwing, having a good time, but… but I also believed it was capable of conveying serious ideas and that the people who listened to it, whatever you want to call them, were looking for something.

"And maybe because it was the only culture I knew when I was 15, it succeeded as a tremendous source of inspiration for me for the entire part of my early life. It truly opened things up for me.

"I heard tremendous depth and sadness in the voice of the singer singing 'Saturday Night At The Movies', and a sense of how the world truly was, not how it was being explained to me, but how it *truly* was and how it truly operated.

"So when it came to be my turn, I said, 'I want to try and present that and, if I can, then I'll feel like I'm doing more than taking up space, y'know?"

He's not taking up so much space these days, not here in his modest dressing room backstage at the Rudi-Seimayer Halle in Munich. Not onstage, surrounded by a selection of three or four acoustic guitars and a shelf of harmonica holders on his first solo tour. Springsteen's sense of commitment to serious issues has never been tested so strongly nor proved so resolute as on this, his Born To Stand And Sitdown Tour, aka The Shut The Fuck Up And Listen Tour. A natural progression from *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* – the starkest, most terrifying album of his career, released in November last year – Springsteen's solo tour is currently heading across Europe after three months in America.

He's been playing small venues, 2-4,000 seaters, many well off the normal circuit, re-establishing links with the local networks of food banks and agencies for the homeless, forged during his megastar years. But now the clamour is less frantic and the aims more focused. That's how he wants it to be; a reflection of the world-weariness and sense of fatalism that informs *Tom Joad*.

In Detroit, Bruce talked onstage about a year-long local newspaper dispute and, although he made a donation to the strikers, was careful not to make moral judgments about those forced by circumstances to cross the picket lines. Then the day he played in Austin, Texas, a city-wide ordinance which effectively made it a criminal offence to be homeless came into effect. In Atlanta, the city's relief organisations told of the pressure that local business interests were putting on police and politicians to clean the vagrants off the streets in preparation for the summer's Olympics.

And when he played in Youngstown, Ohio, the depression-hit, population-decimated steel town featured in the eponymous song that gives voice to all those deemed expendable by late 20th-century American capitalism, they say you could hear the very heartbeat of the place pulsing inside the hall when he sang their song.

Springsteen says there's no substitute for going to the town where someone lives and playing to them. He says there's nothing that can match actually being there. This is, after all, a performer who keeps in touch with his fans – and their mothers. Like the woman he met back in 1981 after going to a cinema in St Louis.

"That particular evening was funny because I saw *Stardust Memories*, the Woody Allen film where he was knocking his fans. The kid sitting next to me said, 'Hey, is that what you think?' and I said 'No'. I was by myself, I was in St Louis and it was 10pm. He said, 'Come on home and meet my mother and she'll make you something to eat.'

"That to me was part of the fun of being me – people asked you to step into their lives out of nowhere. It was always fun, interesting and fascinating. I just saw this kid's mother a couple of weeks ago in St Louis. I still see her, she's come to every show for 15 years. She comes backstage, gives you something to eat and a kiss. Her son's a lawyer now.

"I liked that. Part of what I liked about my job was that I could step out of my hotel, walk down the street and some nights you could just get lost and you'd meet somebody and they'd take you into their life and it was just sort of… I don't know, a way of connecting with things."

In Munich, as with every other show, there's a polite announcement before the performance, reiterating what Springsteen has already told the local press – silence is an integral part of much of the music he'll be playing, and audience co-operation is appreciated. Shortly into his set he puts it rather more bluntly: "Yes, folks, this is a community event so if anybody near you is making too much noise why not all band together and politely tell them to SHUT THE FUCK UP!"

The rapt attention and reaction over two nights in Munich and Hamburg suggests that the qualities being appreciated aren't just the lyrics, but the poetic inflections in Springsteen's voice, the feel for his characters' cadences and rhythms of speech; the way each breath, sigh, pant or moan is heard and made to count.

YEARS AGO, SPRINGSTEEN told an interviewer he was "a nuts-and-bolts sort of guy", who wouldn't make his mark in a mercurial flash of brilliance, but gradually over a long "20 to 25-year" haul. The *Tom Joad* tour, allowing him to expand the artistry of his voice and the eloquence of his guitar-playing as never before, bears the fruits of this approach. But that's not to say the new shows are solely a dark ride. The ripe friskiness of a horny, middle-aged male who has become a father three times since his 40th birthday is well in evidence in introductions to "It's The Little Things That Count" and "Sell It And They Will Come" – unrecorded songs about his own "squalid little sexual fantasies".

A compelling blend of good-natured showman and dedicated artist, Springsteen is obviously aware of the value of contrast. So the jocular banter between songs just goes to highlight the depth of torment and heartbreak at the core of the show – be it a wicked Delta-blues reworking of "Born In The USA", the lost-tether confession of "Highway 29", the awesome unreleased *Joad* outtake, "Brothers Under The Bridge" or the violated innocence of the kids in "Balboa Park".

The impression of a man at ease with himself and his new, lowlier rank in the Celebrity Freak Show is apparent when we meet backstage, some 15 minutes after his final encore in Hamburg. Springsteen is short and stocky, polite and deferential. With his goatee beard and receding hair pulled back into what's not so much a ponytail as a sparrow's cock, he looks not unlike a guy who might change your oil or check your tyres in any western town.

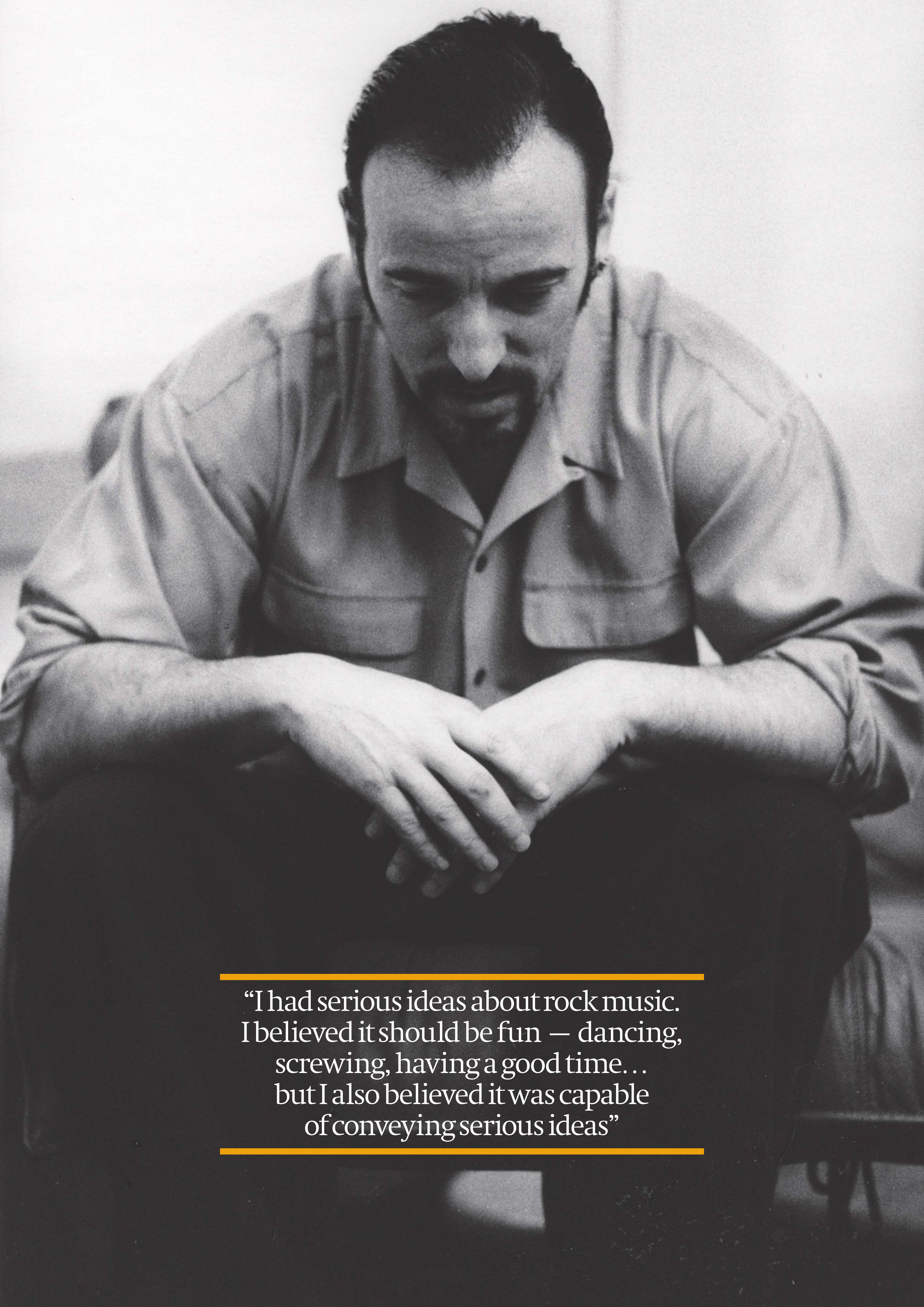
Then, when he grins and his face creases, he reminds you of Robert De Niro – another hardworking Italian-American whose art has centred on struggles of the soul and obsessional behaviour.

In conversation, Springsteen is given to a lot of self-mocking chuckling, but just CONTINUES OVER »

BOSSFACTS

Bruce has officially sanctioned two T-shirts promoting fictional locales mentioned in his songs, Thunder Road and Greasy Lake (from "Spirits In The Night"), to raise money for the US-based charity the National Association To Protect Children

PENNIE SMITH



"I had serious ideas about rock music. I believed it should be fun — dancing, screwing, having a good time… but I also believed it was capable of conveying serious ideas"

as likely he'll slip into a long, slow, deliberating drawl, restarting and revising his sentences, clarifying his meanings; a painstaking approach not dissimilar to the one that has produced the bulk of his recorded output.

He puts his "limited repertoire" of poses into operation for a short photo session, with the proviso that his socks aren't showing.

"That's the only rule I have about photos and I'm very strict about it," he grins.

The photographer mentions Nick Cave and Springsteen interrupts: "Oh, he probably has great socks – he insists you show his socks, am I right?"

Photo session over, he serves up two glasses of Jack Daniel's and ice. Undoing the belt around his pleated pants he attempts – unsuccessfully – to open a bottle of Corona. Then he opens the door and pries off the bottle top using the lock-keep, but the beer froths up over his trousers and shirt.

"That's the trouble with doing it this way," he says, navigating a quick detour into the shower room.

Finally, lager-stained but ready, Springsteen sits down, resting his drinks on the coffee table beside a silver bill-fold, holding some Deutschmarks, an expensive watch and a biker's key ring. Ninety minutes later, Bruce – who admits that he used to drink but "only for effect" – still hasn't touched either his brew or his Jack.

BRUCE AT THE MOVIES 1:

★ Springsteen won both an Oscar and and Golden Globe in 1994 for "Streets Of Philadelphia". His title song from *The Wrestler* brought him a second Golden Globe in 2009

★ Bruce wrote the title song for Paul Schrader's 1987 movie *Light Of Day*, and was instrumental in persuading the director to ditch his original title, 'Born In The USA'

★ Feature film directors who've made Springsteen videos include Brian De Palma ("Dancing In The Dark"), John Sayles ("Born In The USA", "I'm On Fire", "Glory Days") and Jonathan Demme ("Streets Of Philadelphia", "Murder Incorporated")

★ Bruce's favourite childhood film was John Ford's western *The Searchers*

★ Robert De Niro has claimed that the "you talkin' to me?" scene in *Taxi Driver* was inspired by watching Springsteen banter with his audience at a mid-'70s gig

HAVE YOU BEEN working up to a solo tour for a long time?

"I've thought about it since *Nebraska*, but *Nebraska* sort of happened by accident. A planned kind of accident, but enough of an accident that I didn't really think that was something I was going to tour with. I thought about it again when I did *Tunnel Of Love*, but *Tunnel Of Love* was in between a group record and a solo record, and I still couldn't quite imagine going out onstage by myself at that point.

"We did rehearsals where it was just me and a sit-down band and – I hate to use the word – an unplugged-style show. That didn't feel right, if there's a band on stage, people are going to want you to go, 'One, two, three, four,' y'know? So we ended up putting a big tour together.

"So when *Tom Joad* came about I thought, 'This is the chance to do something I've been waiting to do for a while.' Also, I wanted an alternative to touring with a band and all that that involves. I've done it for a long time and I felt like, at

best if I got out there with a band I'd only have something half new to say, because, if you're there with a group of people, automatically you're gonna want to hear, A, B and C.

"Really, the bottom line is that, through the '90s, the voice I've found, the voice that's felt the most present and vital for me, had basically been a folk voice. It really hasn't been my rock voice.

"I was originally signed as a folk singer and so it's a funny sort of thing. John Hammond [*the late, legendary CBS talent scout who signed Billie Holiday, Bob Dylan and Bruce*] would be laughing right now, because he was always saying to me, 'You should make an album with just a guitar.'

"When Jonathan Demme [*director of Philadelphia*] asked for the song ['*Streets Of Philadelphia*'] he focused me outward and then working with the band did the same thing because they are the living manifestation of the community I write about.

"Musicians are funny. When you're home, you're never a real connected part of your own community, so you create one of your own. So I created the band and that was your family and that was the living manifestation of whatever community you imagine and sing about, and I think that's what they were to my fans. I think that's what they represented and that's why the band has power and why it is important and has been important.

"That sense of friendship, loyalty, everybody's different but somehow together; that's why the whole idea of the band has always been a central idea of rock music; that's why bands keep coming. Whether it's the brothers in Oasis or whoever, everybody's fascinated because IT FEELS LIKE REAL LIFE. People trying to make it, to get together and do something together. That's why bands are powerful."

Do you follow young bands?

"Not that much, I hear things in passing. Occasionally I'll go out and do a lot of curiosity-buying. Since the early '80s, my musical influences… they've been ultimately more… I sort of fought back in a way. There was Hank Williams and some of the blues guys and folk guys, but films and writers and novels have probably been the primary influences on my work."

On the album sleeve and onstage monologues, you're quite specific that it's the John Ford film, rather than the Steinbeck book of *The Grapes Of Wrath* that inspired *Tom Joad*.

"That's the way it happened, that's what I saw first. Then I read the novel, which is incredible. I recently re-read it, and you have that beautiful last scene. The book ends on a singular act of human kindness or compassion – the entire book leads to that point. That had a lot of meaning for me at the moment I re-read it because I was searching for a way to go beyond broad platitudes or whatever you want to call them.

"I was looking for a way to make whatever light there is in the world feel real now. So I found myself turning at the end of my record to one person making one decision. I think the things I use to bring some light into the show are those types of things, that's why I play 'Spare Parts' and 'Galveston Bay'. To me, those things are possible, those are things that… any individual at your show can walk out of the building and can lead the next day with that idea or that possibility."

Did therapy affect your most recent writing?

"Nah, that had more effect on my life and the choices that I had; it gave me more control in the way I could live my life. Early on, when I was younger, I could only live my life in one way, it was the only way I knew. I was locked into a very specific and pretty limited mode of behaviour. It was basically the road. I had no capability for a home life or an ability to develop anything more than a glancing relationship."

Did you feel something happening to you at the time?

"No, you're 25 and you don't know anything that's happening to you. All you know is that things are rushing by. At the time I felt like – this is the race."

As a rock'n'roll athlete, Springsteen may be unique – there's never been any account of him having taken a drug, for instance.

"No, I never did."

BOSSFACTS

Bruce joined the Rock'N'Roll Hall Of Fame in 1999, his induction speech given by Bono. He returned the favour when U2 were inducted six years later

YET YOUR SONGS SUGGEST someone well aware of self-destructive urges.

"I've had many self-destructive urges but they've never worked themselves out in the drug area. I've had a funny experience in that I didn't do any drugs; I've never done any drugs. It's not about having any moral point of view about drugs whatsoever – I know nothing about them. I didn't do them for my own reasons, which were probably… I didn't trust myself into putting myself that far out of control. I had a fear of my own internal life.

"I lived in a house where I experienced out-of-controlness and I didn't like it. I suppose I had fears that that was going to be me if I do A, B, C, D or E.

"I was round very many people who did many drugs and I can't particularly say I liked any of them when they were stoned or high, for the most part. Either they were being a pain in the ass or incomprehensible. That's my experience – so it didn't interest me.

"Also, at a very young age, I became very focused on music and experienced a certain sort of ecstasy, actually, through playing. It was just something I loved doing."

But you did take oxygen blasts between sets during your stadium shows?

"I suppose so, if necessary," he laughs.

Those were the days when he was The Boss. A near-superhuman creation, trailing anything up to a four-hour extravaganza of euphoria, shaggy-dog monologues, stories with a bittersweet twist, clowning, death ballads and hard-won heroics. The extended victory march by the man who wanted the heart and soul of the music to rage long into the night. Can he imagine doing it ever again?

"I don't know. I can certainly imagine playing with the band again. I don't know if I'd play for that particular length of time at this point. I mean, I certainly *could*, but I believe I might want to create a more focused show if I went out.

"But it's very tricky because I had the same thought the last time I went out, probably the last five times, then all of a sudden you're looking at the clock and three hours have gone by. So, y'know, I'd have to get there and see.

"As far as the other stuff goes, it was really I had a lot of fuel. I always felt the E Street powering me. We had a lot of *desperate* fun; I think that's what gave the fun, that the band presented an edge, y'know. There were always two sides to that particular band, there was a lot of dark material and yet there was this explosion of actual joy; real, real happiness – whether it was being alive or being with your friends or the audience on a given night. That was real but it was the devil-on-your-heels sort of fun – laughing and running, you know what I mean?"

Did things change when Patti Scialfa [*long-time New Jersey musician and, since 1990, the second and – he's sure – last Mrs Springsteen*] joined?

"When Patti joined, I wanted the band to be more representative of my audience – I said, 'Hey, we need a woman in the band!' I saw the band as representative of myself. We were all in our mid-thirties and I said, 'It's time to deal with these ideas. The band as a lost boys club is a great institution – the level of general misogyny and hostility and the concept of it as always being a place where you can hide from those things.' But I wanted to change that, I didn't want to do it."

What changed you?

"Just getting older, you know, and realising, like the old days – you can run but you can't hide. At some point, if you're not trying to resolve these things then you are going to live a limited life. Maybe you're high as a kite and it doesn't matter to you, I dunno. But ultimately it is going to be a life of limited experience – at least that's what it felt like to me.

"Not only did I want to experience it all – love, closeness, whatever you want to call it, or just inclusion. To create a band that felt inclusive – someone would look and say, 'Hey, that's me!' That's what bands do. That's why people come and why your power is sustained: because people recognise you, themselves, and the world they live in."

You didn't really start writing

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"Through the '90s the voice that's felt the most present and vital for me, has basically been a folk voice, it really hasn't been my rock voice"

PENNIE SMITH

about sex until the *Tunnel Of Love* album. Why had you avoided it until then?

"I hadn't avoided sex, but I'd avoided writing about it. It was just confusing for the first 30 or 35 years of my life. Whatever you're caught up in – you know, you're travelling round with the guys, and women are sort of on the periphery. By the time I was in my mid-thirties that wasn't acceptable any more. I didn't want to be some 50-year-old guy out there with the boys. It seemed like it was going to be boring. Boring and kinda tragic."

ON LUCKY TOWN you sang, *"It's a sad, funny ending when you find yourself pretending/A rich man in a poor man's shirt."* On *Tom Joad* the metaphor is more explicit: you're a land-owning Californian millionaire, writing about welfare rejects, illegal immigrant drug-runners and child prostitutes – people as far removed from you on a socio-economic scale as is possible. Is that what writing is about? Making connections that aren't supposed to be possible?

"The point is, take the children that are in 'Balboa Park', those are your kids, that's what I'm trying to say. It's like, I've got mine, you've got yours and these are kids, too. As a writer, I've been drawn to those subjects, for personal reasons, I'm sure. I don't have some big idea. I don't feel like I have some enormous political message I'm trying to deliver. I think my work has come from the inside. I don't start from the outside – 'I have a statement I want to make, ladies and gentlemen!' I don't do that. I don't like the soapbox thing; so I begin internally with things that matter to me personally and maybe were a part of my life in some fashion.

"I lived in a house where there was a lot of struggle to find work, where the results of not being able to find your place in society manifested themselves with the resulting lack of self-worth, with anger, with violence.

"And, as I grew up, I said, 'Hey, that's my song', because, I don't know, maybe that was my experience at a very important moment in my life. And those ideas, those questions, those issues were things I've written about my entire career. I still feel very motivated by them and I still probably do my best work when I'm working inside of those things, which must be because that's where I'm connected. That's just the lights I go by."

Did you do any research to amass the material and detail that features in *Tom Joad*?

"Things happen from all over the place. I met a guy in Arizona who told me a story about his brother who rode in a teenage motorcycle gang in the San Fernando Valley, called the Vagos. I just happened to meet this guy by the side of the road in this little motel. I don't know, it just stayed with me for a very long time and when I went to write it, I kept hearing his voice.

"If you're in Los Angeles, there's an enormous amount of border news. Immigration and border life is a big part of the town. That's part of what I've gotten from being in California every year, for half the year, for the last five years. It's a very, very powerful place; a place where issues that are alive and confronting America are happening at this moment. It represents what the country is turning into; a place where you see the political machinations of how the issue of immigration is being used, and a lot of the bullshit that goes down with it. It's just the place that, ready or not, America is going to become."

Your reputation has always been of someone who is incredibly prolific and gives away as many good songs as you keep for yourself. Have you ever had a period when you haven't been able to write?

"Well, if I was *that* prolific I'd have put out more records. I suppose there's prolific in writing a lot of songs and there's prolific in writing a lot of *good* songs! I've written plenty of songs, but to me a lot of them didn't measure up because I wrote with purpose. My idea wasn't to get the next 10 songs and put out an album and get out on the road. I wrote with purpose in mind, so I edited very intensely the music I was writing. So when I felt there was a collection of songs that had a point of view, that was when I released a record. For the most part I didn't release a record until I felt like it, because I didn't think my fundamental goal was to have hit records. I had an idea, y'know, and following the thread of that idea, when I thought I had something that would be valuable to my fans, something enjoyable, something entertaining, something that wouldn't waste their time when I put a record out. I could have put out a whole lot more casual records but, at the time, you're honing an identity of some sort."

An image?

"Image? Sort of, I suppose. That's part of it to some degree, but that's like the top part – the frothy stuff."

Did you ever have a big gay following?

"Not to my knowledge."

There was always something very camp about that grease-monkey- baseball-hat-in-the-back-pocket look during *Born In The USA*…

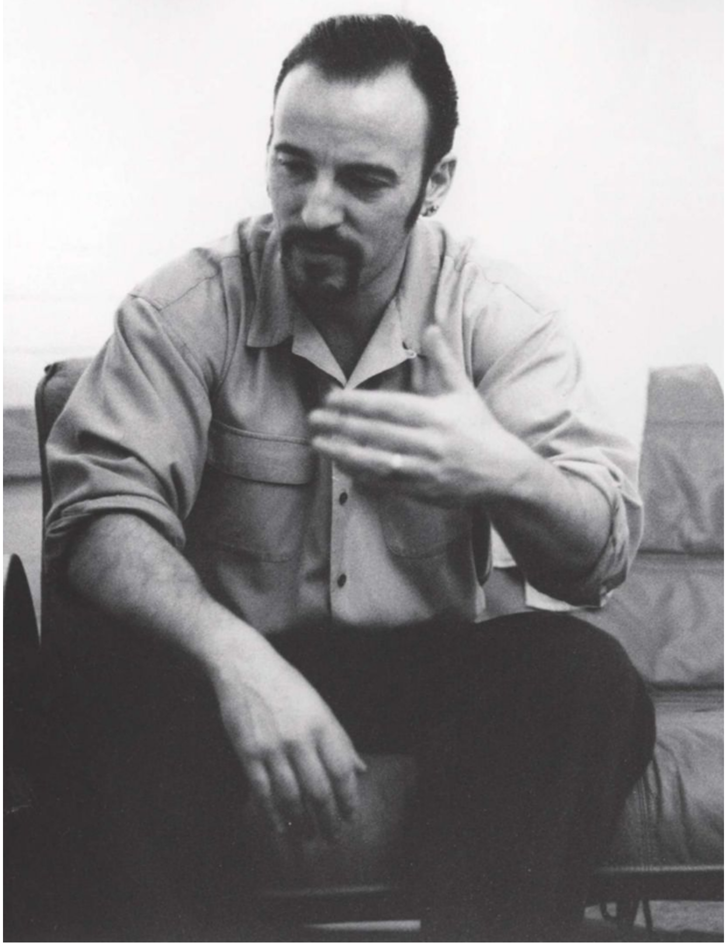
"It was probably my own fault. Who knows, I was probably working out my own insecurities, y'know? That particular image is probably the only time I look back over pictures of the band and it feels like a caricature to me.

"Everything before and after that is just people, but that particular moment I always go, 'Jeez', y'know? I couldn't tell you what that was about.

"All I could tell you was, when I wrote 'Streets Of Philadelphia' and I had some contact with gay people, who the song had meant something to, I felt the image that I had at that time could have been misinterpreted, y'know? That is something that I regretted and still do regret, to some degree.

"But, at the same time, it must have been an easy image to latch onto. Maybe it had something to do with why it was powerful or what it represented. But it was very edgy to me and very close to – if it wasn't already – over-simplification. It was certainly over-simplified if you just saw the image and didn't go to the show and get a sense of where it was coming from and what it was about. It had implications that I didn't tune into at the time and I don't really feel are a fundamental part of my work."

IS THERE AN ELEMENT of surrealism playing at the Rock 'N' Roll Hall Of Fame and finding yourself standing beside the real, living, breathing heroes you once worshipped from a distance?



PENNIE SMITH

"I don't need to sell records that are going to make millions, I need to do work that sets me in the present"

"Yeah, one night I was standing between George Harrison and Mick Jagger and y'know, I sat in my room with their records, I learned to play my guitar from those records. I studied every riff and the way they played it and my initial bands were modelled on them. So there's always a little bit of, 'Hey, what am I doing here?' You realise there were millions and millions of kids at that time that had that particular fantasy or whatever you want to call it.

"But I'm sort of glad that I have a place generationally, where I get to stand with those people onstage. It's a tremendous source of pleasure being able to back up Chuck Berry, one of the great American writers, a GREAT American writer. He captured an essential part of the country in a fashion that no-one has done before or since."

Are you sad that his creative life as a writer lasted for such a short period?

"That's just the way it goes. I have no idea how people's creative instincts work. I'm just glad for the work he's done. It was very influential in my work in the sense that there was a lot of detail in the writing, fundamental images I carried into my own music.

"That's the course of rock music. It's very unusual to be 20 or 25 years down the line and still be doing vital work. I think the reason is, it takes an enormous leap of faith at the time of your success, a leap of consciousness, and the ability to suss out what is essential and what is bullshit is very important.

"Money comes in – great! We can let the good times roll, we can have fun with it. But if you start out and get caught up in the idea that these things are going to sustain you in some fashion when you get 20 years down the road, you're gonna be in for a surprise.

"Right now, I don't need records that are No 1. I don't need to sell records that are going to make millions. I need to do work that I feel is central, vital, that sets me in the present, where I don't have to come out at night and depend upon my history or a song I wrote 20 years ago. What I'm interested in doing now is finding my place in the world as it stands. That to me is what is vital and sustains you and gives you the commitment and motivation to tour and stand behind your work. That's all I know, 20 or 25 years down the line."

Is there a sense of fear attached to what you do?

"Of course, that's part of everything. I think if there is a fear, it's a fear of slipping out of things. By that I don't mean the mainstream of the music business. This particular record, I knew when I put it out it wasn't going to be on the radio very much and it wasn't! Fundamentally, it wasn't going to be part of what the mainstream music business is today, in the States anyway."

We've all seen *Spinal Tap*, with the idea of an audience becoming more selective.

"[*Laughs*] I guess there's the sense that you are protective over your artistic life and creative impetus, your creative instinct, your creative vitality. That's something I've known since I was tearing the posters down in 1975 [*on his first visit to Britain, Springsteen went on the rampage, tearing down posters outside Hammersmith Odeon proclaiming him 'the future of rock'n'roll'*] and it's something I still feel real strongly about today."

BOSSFACTS

E Street Band drummer Max Weinberg occasionally plays in a Beatles tribute act, The Fab Faux, comprising musicians from the house bands of chat show hosts David Letterman and Conan O'Brien

ARE THERE MOMENTS when you've surprised or disappointed yourself?

"You're always doing that. You look back and say, 'I did that well, I didn't do that, I communicated well here but not there.' It's just endless, y'know? That's the idea, that's why you've always got some place to go tomorrow, something to do now. That's why this particular music is not a rock show, it's not unplugged, it's something else. I don't even know if I should call it a folk show. In a funny way, the songs are based in rock music, but I suppose it's based around the new record. It's not a night where I come out and play hits or favourite songs you wanna hear. There's no pay-off at the end of the night with those things. It is what it is and that's my intent."

Is your ongoing work a reaction and extension of the work you've done in the past?

"Of course, because the artist's job, in my opinion, is to try and answer the questions that your body of work throws up, or at least pose new questions. With this record, that's what I'm trying to do.

"I felt for 10 years I put a lot of those questions on hold because I was writing about other things, I was having some reaction to the *Born In The USA* experience, because I was finding my way through a new life, in some sense."

On the sleevenotes to your hits collection you describe "Born To Run" as your shot at the title, a 25-year-old's attempt to craft "the greatest record ever made". How do you feel about it today?

"Oh, I don't know, I can't listen to it objectively, it's too caught up in my life. I don't sit around listening to my work, I'd be insane if I did, I'd be crazy. I like it as a record but, right now, it's hard for me to hear it because it's caught up with so many other things.

"It's a really good song. The way I would record it now would be a lot different, probably not as good, because I would be afraid of going over the top, and there's a moment to go completely over the top and push the edge of things."

Your relationship with "Born In The USA" is like Dylan's with "Like A Rolling Stone", trying to grasp back the song's real meaning rather than allowing it to become a faceless anthem. It wasn't just Ronald Reagan [*who tried to claim it as an effective endorsement of his jingoistic agenda*] who misinterpreted the song.

"The record of it I still feel is very good and I wouldn't change it or want it to be different. I wouldn't want the version that I'm doing now to have come out at that time. At that particular moment, it was how I heard it and it happened in a couple of takes.

"You put your music out and it comes back to you in a variety of different ways through your audience. But a songwriter always has the opportunity to go out and reclarify or reclaim his work; it pushes you to be inventive. I think the version I have now… for me, at least, it's the best version I've done of the song, I suppose it's the truest, y'know. It's got it all – everything it needs to be understood at the moment."

You write a lot about killers – people like the death-row inmate played by Sean Penn in *Dead Man Walking* [Springsteen's title song for the Tim Robbins-directed movie has just been Oscar-nominated] and the slayer in "Nebraska". Have you ever met a real-life killer? Is it necessary to do your job right?

"No, you're not trying to recreate the experience, you're trying to recreate the emotions and the things that went into the action being taken. Those are things that everyone understands, those are things that everyone has within them. The action is the symptom, that's what happened, but the things that caused that action to happen, that's what everyone knows about – you know about it, I know about it. It's inside of every human being.

"Those are the things you gotta mine, that's the well that you gotta dip into and, if you're doing that, you're going to get something central and fundamental about those characters."

So it's just coincidence that you currently look like the character Sean Penn plays in the movie?

"I do? I didn't realise that. Help! I'm going home… I don't have as much hair as he does, for a start." ✪

BRUCE AT THE MOVIES 2:

★ **Springsteen's younger sister Pamela, now a photographer, was briefly a film actress, making her big screen debut in *Fast Times At Ridgemont High*. She also played a serial killer in two instalments of the low-budget horror series *Sleepaway Camp***

★ **The working title for *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* was 'American Madness', taken from the 1932 Frank Capra film of the same name**

★ **"All That Heaven Will Allow", from *Tunnel Of Love*, was inspired by the 1955 Douglas Sirk melodrama *All That Heaven Allows*, while "Thunder Road" shares its title with a 1958 noir classic starring Robert Mitchum**

★ **Sean Penn's directorial debut *The Indian Runner* was based on Springsteen's "Highway Patrolman". Bruce wrote "Missing" specifically for Penn's second film, *The Crossing Guard***

★ **Springsteen was nominated in the Best Cameo category at the 2001 MTV Movie Awards for his fleeting appearance in *High Fidelity***

TRACKS

Bruce takes stock: a capricious four-CD race through the archives. BY LUKE TORN

★ 10 NOVEMBER 1998

IT IS LEGENDARY producer John Hammond, so instrumental in the careers of giants from Billie Holiday to Bob Dylan, who kicks off *Tracks*, Bruce Springsteen's long-anticipated bootleg series. Speaking in his thick Brooklyn brogue, he announces the 1972 "Columbia pop audition" that would, in time, transform the scruffy kid from the Jersey Shore into one of rock's pre-eminent statesmen.

Springsteen was generally accustomed to bringing plenty of sonic crunch. But this time, with everything on the line, he was armed with just an acoustic guitar and a passel of vociferous songs: "It's Hard to Be A Saint In The City", "Growin' Up", "Does This Bus Stop At 82nd Street?" Effusive blasts of romantic lyricism, flashing streetwise imagery and youthful revolt – "twisted autobiographies" he would later call them – Springsteen poured his all into the performances. Even then, they were merely the tip of a very large iceberg indeed.

The same could be said for *Tracks*. Springsteen's first major effort to sort through his vast archive initially netted some 200 to 300 cuts, which made for initial reports of a six-disc retrospective. The editing modus operandi, he explained, was to sketch a sort of shadow career, "an alternate version of my life."

"There were too many songs initially, and I edited it down to things that were directly related to records I'd released," he repeatedly explained during a round of interviews that autumn. "If you liked *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* or *The River*, if you liked *Born In The USA*, *Tunnel Of Love* or *Nebraska*, there's a reference point for where a lot of the music is coming from. These songs didn't feel like outtakes – they were just unreleased. They stand on their own and are as good in many ways as the stuff we put out. We left off a lot of things that were the most fun."

Indeed, from the three-minute bursts of guitar pop he was favouring during *The River*, to early rave-ups like "Give The

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

DISC 1

1 **Mary Queen Of Arkansas,** *Hammond Demo Session, CBS Studios, New York City, May 3, 1972.* ★★★
2 **It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City,** *Hammond Demo Session, CBS Studios, New York City, May 3, 1972.* ★★★★
3 **Growin' Up,** *Hammond Demo Session, CBS Studios, New York City, May 3, 1972.* ★★★★
4 **Does This Bus Stop At 82nd St?,** *Hammond Demo Session, CBS Studios, New York City, May 3, 1972.* ★★★
5 **Bishop Danced,** *Live at Max's Kansas City, New York City, 1973.* ★★
6 **Santa Ana,** *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle outtake, Sound Recording Studios, Blauvelt, NY, June 28, 1973.* ★★★★
7 **Seaside Bar Song,** *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle outtake, Sound Recording Studios, Blauvelt, NY, June 28, 1973.* ★★★★
8 **Zero And Blind Terry,** *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle outtake, Sound Recording Studios, Blauvelt, NY, June 28, 1973.* ★★★★★
9 **Linda Let Me Be The One,** *Born To Run outtake, The Record Plant, New York City, June 28, 1975.* ★★
10 **Thundercrack,** *The Wild, The Innocent & The E Street Shuffle outtake, Sound Recording Studios, Blauvelt, NY, June 28, 1973.* ★★★★★
11 **Rendezvous,** *Live At Nassau Coliseum, Uniondale, NY, December 31, 1980.* ★★★★★
12 **Give The Girl A Kiss,** *Darkness On The Edge Of Town outtake, The Record Plant, New York City, November 10, 1977.* ★★★
13 **Iceman,** *Darkness On The Edge Of Town outtake, The Record Plant, New York City, October 27, 1977.* ★★★★
14 **Bring On The Night,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, June 13, 1979.* ★★★★★
15 **So Young And In Love,** *Darkness On The Edge Of Town outtake, The Record Plant, New York City, January 6, 1978.* ★★★
16 **Hearts Of Stone,** *Darkness On The Edge Of Town outtake, The Record Plant, New York City, October 14, 1977.* ★★★
17 **Don't Look Back,** *Darkness On The Edge Of Town outtake, The Record Plant, New York City, July 2, 1977.* ★★★★

DISC 2

1 **Restless Nights,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, April 11,1980.* ★★★★★
2 **A Good Man Is Hard To Find (Pittsburgh),** *Born In The USA outtake, The Power Station, New York City, May 5, 1982.* ★★★★
3 **Roulette,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, April 3,1979.* ★★★★★
4 **Dollhouse,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, August 21, 1979.* ★★★★
5 **Where The Bands Are,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, August 21, 1979.* ★★★★★
6 **Loose Ends,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, July 18, 1979.* ★★★★★
7 **Living On The Edge Of The World,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, December 7, 1979.* ★★★
8 **Wages Of Sin,** *Born In The USA outtake, The Power Station, New York City, May 10, 1982.* ★★★★
9 **Take 'Em As They Come,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, April 10, 1980.* ★★★★★
10 **Be True,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, July 21, 1979 [originally the 1981 b-side of "Fade Away"].* ★★★
11 **Ricky Wants A Man Of Her Own,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, July 16, 1979.* ★
12 **I Wanna Be With You,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, May 31, 1979.* ★★
13 **Mary Lou,** *The River outtake, The Power Station, New York City, May 30, 1979.* ★★
14 **Stolen Car,** *The River alternate take, The Power Station, New York City, July 26, 1979.* ★★★★★
15 **Born In The USA,** *Nebraska outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, Colts Neck, NJ, January 1982.* ★★★★★
16 **Johnny Bye-Bye,** *Hollywood Hills Recording Session, Thrill Hill Recording, Los Angeles, CA, January 1983.* ★★★★★
17 **Shut Out The Light,** *Hollywood Hills Recording Session/Born In The USA outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, Los Angeles, CA, January 1983.* ★★★★★

bruce springsteen
TRACKS

1 bruce springsteen TRACKS
2 bruce springsteen TRACKS
3 bruce springsteen TRACKS
4 bruce springsteen TRACKS
COLUMBIA

1
1 MARY QUEEN OF ARKANSAS
2 IT'S HARD TO BE A SAINT IN THE CITY
3 GROWIN' UP
4 DOES THIS BUS STOP AT 82ND STREET?
5 BISHOP DANCED
6 SANTA ANA
7 SEASIDE BAR SONG
8 ZERO AND BLIND TERRY
9 LINDA LET ME BE THE ONE
10 THUNDERCRACK
11 RENDEZVOUS
12 GIVE THE GIRL A KISS
13 ICEMAN
14 BRING ON THE NIGHT
15 SO YOUNG AND IN LOVE
16 HEARTS OF STONE
17 DON'T LOOK BACK
3
1 CYNTHIA
2 MY LOVE WILL NOT LET YOU DOWN
3 THIS HARD LAND
4 FRANKIE
5 TV MOVIE
6 STAND ON IT
7 LION'S DEN
8 CAR WASH
9 ROCKAWAY THE DAYS
10 BROTHERS UNDER THE BRIDGES ('83)
11 MAN AT THE TOP
12 PINK CADILLAC
13 TWO FOR THE ROAD
14 JANEY DON'T YOU LOSE HEART
15 WHEN YOU NEED ME
16 THE WISH
17 THE HONEYMOONERS
18 LUCKY MAN
2
1 RESTLESS NIGHTS
2 A GOOD MAN IS HARD TO FIND (PITTSBURGH)
3 ROULETTE
4 DOLLHOUSE
5 WHERE THE BANDS ARE
6 LOOSE ENDS
7 LIVING ON THE EDGE OF THE WORLD
8 WAGES OF SIN
9 TAKE 'EM AS THEY COME
10 BE TRUE
11 RICKY WANTS A MAN OF HER OWN
12 I WANNA BE WITH YOU
13 MARY LOU
14 STOLEN CAR
15 BORN IN THE U.S.A.
16 JOHNNY BYE-BYE
17 SHUT OUT THE LIGHT
4
1 LEAVIN' TRAIN
2 SEVEN ANGELS
3 GAVE IT A NAME
4 SAD EYES
5 MY LOVER MAN
6 OVER THE RISE
7 WHEN THE LIGHTS GO OUT
8 LOOSE CHANGE
9 TROUBLE IN PARADISE
10 HAPPY
11 PART MAN, PART MONKEY
12 GOIN' CALI
13 BACK IN YOUR ARMS
14 BROTHERS UNDER THE BRIDGE
PRODUCED BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN AND CHUCK PLOTKIN
HDCD
COLUMBIA

Girl A Kiss" and "Seaside Bar Song", *Tracks* might be termed 'Another Side Of Bruce Springsteen', for its light-hearted fare.

In retrospect, 1998 appears to have been an appropriate time for Springsteen to look back. The E Street Band had been (generally) out of commission for nearly a decade. Several recording projects had been started and just as quickly abandoned in the three years since his acoustic turn, *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*. You could easily attribute his return to the E Street fold, with extensive touring in 1999 and 2000, to *Tracks* and the memories it must have conjured.

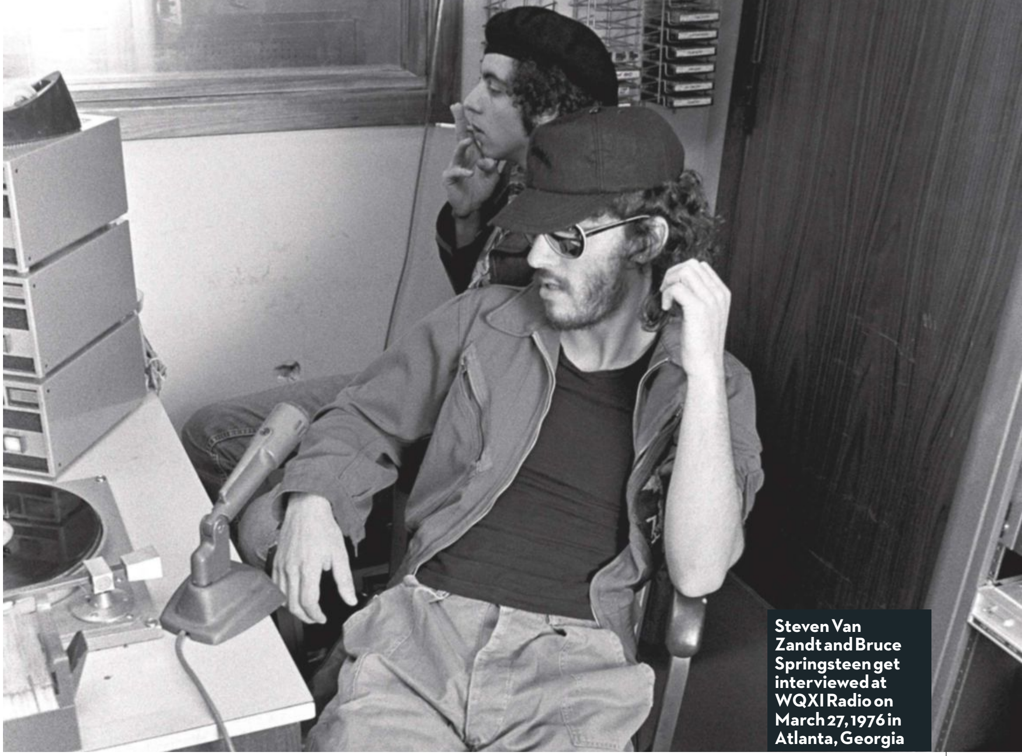
"I was in the middle of figuring out what to do next when I thought, rather than have a couple of years go by with no music coming out, I could release stuff from the vault," he reasoned. "I decided, I'm going to listen to everything I've ever done. So the engineer sent me a big box of tapes, and I spent a week or more going through 'em."

Over the years, Springsteen had amassed an absurd amount of material, scores of unheard tracks laid down for most every album. Given the quality of Bruce's output, and the fervour of his fans, some of those – "Roulette", "Fire", "Thundercrack", "The Fever", "The Promise", "Loose Ends", electric versions of material on *Nebraska*, and on and on – took on a mythology of their own, fans poring over every muddy bootleg, every lyric variation, every stray Roy Bittan keyboard riff.

Despite the logic of Springsteen's explanation regarding his editing protocol, though, *Tracks* turns out to be a strangely incongruous beast, hardly filling in every crucial gap. Nearly half (29 cuts) of the tracklisting was dedicated to sessions for *The River* and *Born In The USA*, with another dozen or so culled from the relatively recent *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*. Meanwhile, extras from *Born To Run* and *Nebraska* were, but for a stray cut or two, conspicuously absent.

In addition, obvious selections from the man's hungry years were missing: the original cut of "Because The Night", subsequently a hit for Patti Smith; a gripping, sombre acoustic "Thunder Road", long held dear by collectors; and perhaps the most dramatic of the *Darkness* compositions, "The Promise", described by biographer Dave Marsh as being about "the price everyone pays for success – and the dangers of settling for anything less". Springsteen later rectified some prominent omissions on subsequent anthologies, even re-recording "The Promise," but still…

All quibbling aside,



Steven Van Zandt and Bruce Springsteen get interviewed at WQXI Radio on March 27, 1976 in Atlanta, Georgia

Full of striking, engaging work, *Tracks* remains an essential – though curiously incomplete – compendium

Tracks proves a trove of Springsteen backroads and sidetrips, starting in earnest with supplements to 1973's *The Wild, The Innocent, & The E Street Shuffle*. "Zero And Blind Terry", a sprawling Romeo-and-Juliet tale set amid gangland Jersey, matches up a dazzling rock/soul/R'n'B hybrid with some outrageous wild west storytelling – a prototype "Jungleland". "Thundercrack", a one-time show-closer presumably dropped from Shuffle's lineup due to similarities to "Rosalita", is *Tracks*' kinetic high point, a freewheeling eight-minute rollercoaster with shades of Van Morrison's equally celebratory "Wild Night". "Santa Ana", inspired by a trip with his father to Tijuana, is a galloping border tune. As with countless *Tracks* takes, drafts really, lines and verses later migrate into album cuts. Bits of "Santa Ana", for example, would turn up in *Born To Run*'s "She's The One". "It's a little carnie band," Springsteen said about this cul-de-sac for the E Street sound. "You hear the influences which Danny [Federici] had a lot to do with – the boardwalk, the accordion, the atmosphere from the lyric writing which came out of that particular environment."

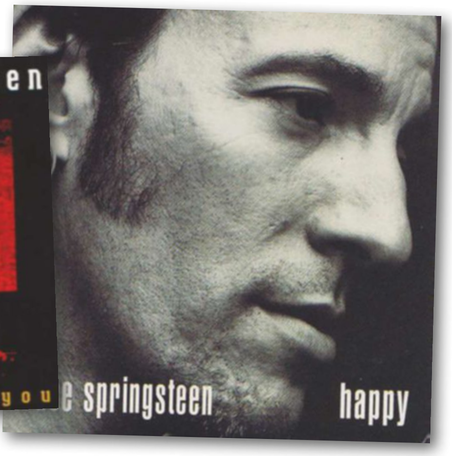
As dazzling as the …*E Street Shuffle* material is (and the *Born To Run* stuff, ignored on *Tracks* except for the throwaway "Linda Let Me Be The One") Springsteen's artistry grew dramatically when his characters began to bump up against the world's harsher realities. Lurking behind the taut strictures of the albums proper, though, were works that ran wild with this aesthetic. "Iceman", an early, discarded cut recorded at the *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* sessions, tellingly tips off his newfound dark perspective. Its gentle piano figures and sombre melody belie one of Springsteen's most chilling lyrics: *"Once they tried to steal my heart/Beat it right outta my head/But baby they didn't know that I was born dead/I am the iceman, fightin' for the right to live."*

"Loose Ends" is another gut-punch portrait, the protagonist lovers here so broken they're

BOSSFACTS

★ To the dismay of many sensing an uncharacteristic money-grab, Springsteen issued a single-disc sampler (*18 Tracks*) in 1999, which just happened to include three cuts absent from the box's 4-disc, 66-song playlist. Two of which – "The Fever" and a remade "The Promise" – surely deserved inclusion on Tracks. In 2000, a dozen more rarities comprised *The Essential Bruce Springsteen*'s bonus disc

★ When *Tracks* was released in late 1998, the bootleggers were ready. No less than four multi-disc sets, covering some 250 studio outtakes and live cuts spanning his career all the way back to the Castiles era, began making the rounds within months



TOM HILL/WIREIMAGE

falling through the gallows. *"How could something so bad, darling, come from something so good?"* Springsteen pleads as the song winds into a fiery Clarence Clemons sax solo. A fierce rocker set to Roy Bittan's elegant piano and a haunting, tumbling melody, it's the E Street Band at their zenith.

"I wanted my characters to feel weathered, older, but not beaten," Springsteen later explained. "The sense of daily struggle in each song greatly increased. The possibility of transcendence or any sort of personal redemption felt a lot harder to come by. This was the tone I wanted to sustain."

"Roulette", recorded for *The River*, represents the logical extreme of this approach – here his characters face nuclear meltdown – with singer and band boiling over in anger and recrimination. It's possibly Springsteen's fiercest performance on the record. "'Roulette' was written on the tail of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident," Bruce wrote in his coffee table lyric collection, *Songs*. "It had an appropriately paranoid lyric and an exciting track, but it never made it to the record."

For all Springsteen's steely anthems of a life spent in struggle, though, a curious dichotomy develops around the time of *The River*, with the arrival of powerpop Bruce. Rattling, infectious AM-radio pop, songs stuffed with catchy lines that offer respite, even a rocker's redemption, from life's grimmer realities. For the record, there's also rockabilly Bruce ("Pink Cadillac"), reggae Bruce ("Part Man, Part Monkey"), and soul balladeer Bruce ("Back In Your Arms").

"In *The River* stretch," Springsteen recalled, "I had gotten into Woody Guthrie and country music, and my work began to be influenced by books and films. At the same time, I was listening to the Raspberries' Greatest Hits, so I wrote all these short pop songs." Indeed, "I Wanna Be With You", an overcooked *River* outtake, even borrows a song title from Eric Carmen's underrated Cleveland popsters. "Restless Nights", leading off *Tracks* disc two, is perhaps a more successful merging of both approaches, its lyric reflecting inner turbulence, its chorus a fetching singalong-with-the-sadness. Here, a keening, spring-coiled melody, overseen by Springsteen's anxiety-ridden vocals, gives way to an epic and surprisingly psychedelic freakout.

The similarly driving "Where the Bands Are" was derived from an earlier piece called "Let's Go". Pure rock'n'roll abandon, it seems surely to owe its existence to Springsteen's brief dalliance with The Ramones. Disc two wraps with three sublime early '80s efforts: "Shut Out The Light", a heartbreaking slice-of-life ballad sung from the point of view of a returning Vietnam vet; Springsteen's succinct Elvis tribute "Johnny Bye-Bye", which somehow doubles as a sequel to Chuck Berry's "Johnny B Goode"; and an extraordinary, black-as-coal *Nebraska* sessions take of "Born In The USA".

From here on out, *Tracks* continues to pepper listeners with striking, engaging work, but never quite scales its more dizzying heights. Even as the hype kicked into overdrive circa *Born In The USA* – Springsteen reportedly recorded some 100 songs for the project – sentimentality crept in, too, and a tendency to repeat familiar themes. One could rightly argue that angry young Springsteen was being phased out – and the presence of throwaways like "Lion's Den" and "My Lover Man", especially in lieu of the grand material still under wraps – suggested that his quality control was fraying.

Still, "This Hard Land" is fine Guthrie-inspired folk-rock, the deceptively bouncy "Rockaway The Days" suggests lingering obsession with Charlie Starkweather-type killers (see *Nebraska*'s title song), and sundry discussions of faith and family circa *Tunnel Of Love* are serviceable. Then there's "The Wish": a crystalline postcard to his mother, with heartbreakingly vivid details and Springsteen's best Duane Eddy guitar licks. It might be *Tracks*' crowning moment.

"Oh yeah, that was my mother, that was my mother completely," he told a reporter regarding "The Wish". "That's probably why I didn't use it on the record; it's one of the most autobiographical things I ever really wrote. I wrote it for *Tunnel Of Love* and she just might have been more of a presence in my life at that particular time."

Disc four, concentrating on 1992's *Human Touch*, presents Springsteen the craftsman songwriter, veering toward MOR, with occasional detours into hard rock and/or a kind of melancholy minimalism. Free from the E Streeters, he toys with mood and texture, oftentimes following trajectories of characters established years earlier.

"Initially… I thought about putting out a record that was basically a bass, a synthesiser, and rhythm," Springsteen said of this period, "They were experimental pieces, and they were away from the rock music I was making at the time."

Almost 20 years later, Tracks remains an essential, though curiously incomplete compendium. Sporadic reports had the Boss working on Tracks 2 which, even if it only comprised of known bootlegs, could form a compelling set; hardcore fans surely would lobby for a Dick's Picks Grateful Dead-style archive strategy.

It has not materialised, although 2010's *The Promise* (*see pp 124-127*) has gone a long way to quench the thirst for rarities. ✪

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ **"*Tracks* draws on the inevitable surplus that results from a performer whose output is as legendary as the long hours he's spent deciding what to release and what to shelve."** **GAVIN MARTIN, UNCUT, JANUARY 1999**

★ **"Boxed sets were made for the likes of Bruce – all those sweaty sessions when the fever wouldn't leave him."** **STUART BAILIE, NME, NOVEMBER 28, 1998**

TRACKMARKS

DISC 3

1 Cynthia, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, April 20, 1983.* ★★
2 My Love Will Not Let You Down, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, NYC, May 5, 1982.* ★★★★
3 This Hard Land, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, May 11, 1982.* ★★★★★
4 Frankie, *Born In The USA outtake, The Power Station, New York City, May 14, 1982.* ★★★★
5 TV Movie, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, June 13, 1983.* ★★★
6 Stand On It, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, June 13, 1983 [originally the 1984 b-side to "Glory Days"].* ★★★
7 Lion's Den, *Born In The USA outtake, The Power Station, New York City, January 25, 1982.* ★
8 Car Wash, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, May 31, 1983.* ★★★
9 Rockaway The Days, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, February 3, 1984.* ★★★★★
10 Brothers Under The Bridges, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, NYC, September 4, 1983.* ★★★
11 Man At The Top, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, January 12, 1984.* ★★★
12 Pink Cadillac, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, May 31, 1983 [originally the 1984 b-side to "Dancing in the Dark"].* ★★★★
13 Two For The Road, *Tunnel Of Love outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, Rumson, NJ, February 1987 [originally the 1987 b-side to "Tunnel of Love"].* ★★★★
14 Janey, Don't You Lose Heart, *Born In The USA outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, June 16, 1983 [originally the 1984 b-side to "I'm Goin' Down"].* ★★★★
15 When You Need Me, *Tunnel Of Love outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, Rumson, NJ, January 20, 1987.* ★★★
16 The Wish, *Tunnel Of Love outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, Rumson, NJ, February 22, 1987.* ★★★★★
17 The Honeymooners, *Tunnel Of Love outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, Rumson, NJ, February 22, 1987.* ★★★
18 Lucky Man, *Tunnel Of Love outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, Rumson, NJ, April 4, 1987 [originally the 1987 b-side to "Brilliant Disguise"].* ★★★

DISC 4

1 Leavin' Train, *Human Touch outtake, Oceanway Studios, Los Angeles, February 27, 1990.* ★★
2 Seven Angels, *Human Touch outtake, Oceanway Studios, Los Angeles, June 29, 1990.* ★★★
3 Gave It A Name, *Tracks original session, Thrill Hill Recording, Rumson, NJ, August 24, 1998.* ★★★
4 Sad Eyes, *Human Touch outtake, Soundworks West, Los Angeles, January 25, 1990.* ★★★★
5 My Lover Man, *Human Touch outtake, Soundworks West, Los Angeles, December 4, 1990.* ★★
6 Over The Rise, *Human Touch outtake, Soundworks West, Los Angeles, December 7, 1990.* ★★★★
7 When The Lights Go Out, *Human Touch outtake, The Record Plant, Los Angeles, December 6, 1990.* ★★★
8 Loose Change, *Human Touch outtake, The Record Plant, Los Angeles, January 31, 1991.* ★★★★
9 Trouble In Paradise, *Human Touch outtake, Soundworks West, Los Angeles, December 1, 1989.* ★★
10 Happy, *Lucky Town outtake, A&M Studios, Los Angeles, January 18, 1991.* ★★★★
11 Part Man, Part Monkey, *Human Touch outtake, Soundworks West, Los Angeles, January 1990.* ★★
12 Goin' Cali, *Human Touch outtake, A&M Studios, Los Angeles, January 29, 1991.* ★★★★
13 Back In Your Arms, *Greatest Hits outtake, The Hit Factory, New York City, January 12, 1995.* ★★★
14 Brothers Under The Bridge, *Ghost Of Tom Joad outtake, Thrill Hill Recording, LA, May 22, 1995.* ★★★

Released: November 10, 1998
Compilation produced by: Bruce Springsteen and Chuck Plotkin
Individual Session Producers: John Hammond, Mike Appel, Jim Cretecos, Bruce Springsteen, Chuck Plotkin, Jon Landau, Steve Van Zandt, Roy Bittan
Highest chart position: UK 50; US 27

THE RISING

"Tell me how do you live broken-hearted?" Sorrow, courage and hope in the aftermath of 9/11, as the E Street Band return to service.

BY ALLAN JONES

30 JULY 2002

JOE FARRELLY WAS New Jersey to his bones. He was born in Newark, grew up in Old Bridge and since 1980 had made his home in Prince's Bay. Joe was 19 when in 1973 he became the youngest-ever fireman hired by the New Brunswick Fire Department and later served in the South Old Bridge Volunteer Fire Company before joining the New York Fire Department in 1978. By 2001 he was a Captain, working out of the South Street Seaport firehouse in Manhattan.

Joe Farrelly's crews were among the rescue workers evacuating survivors of the attacks on New York's World Trade Center on the morning of September 11, 2001, when the Twin Towers came down on them. Joe Farrelly was 47 and among other things, according to his obituaries in New Jersey newspapers, a Bruce Springsteen fan.

"At the beginning of October, I was at home alone and heavily medicated," his widow, Stacey, later told *Time* magazine. "I picked up the phone and a voice said, 'May I speak to Stacey? This is Bruce Springsteen.'"

They spoke for 40 minutes.

"After I got off the phone with him," she told *Time*, "the world just felt a little smaller. I got through Joe's memorial and a good month and a half on that phonecall."

Suzanne Berger's husband Jim was also lost that day. He was a Senior VP at Aon, an insurance company with a staff of 1,100 people working in the south tower of the World Trade Center whose evacuation he supervised, saving nearly all of them, before the tower collapsed around him. Suzanne Berger told *Time* about a call similar to the one Stacey Farrelly had received, after Jim's obituary in *The New York Times* mentioned prominently that he had also been a Springsteen fan.

"He said, 'I want to respect your privacy, but I just want you to know that I was very touched and I want to know more about your husband,'" Suzanne Berger said of the conversation she had with Springsteen. "He wanted to hear Jim's story, so I told him."

This is what Springsteen seems to have done in the stricken days that followed Al-Qaeda's brutal intrusions: he read the

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Lonesome Day ★★★★
2 Into The Fire ★★★★★
3 Waitin' On A Sunny Day ★★★★
4 Nothing Man ★★★
5 Countin' On A Miracle ★★★★
6 Empty Sky ★★★★
7 Worlds Apart ★★★★★
8 Let's Be Friends (Skin To Skin) ★★★
9 Further On (Up The Road) ★★★
10 The Fuse ★★★★★
11 Mary's Place ★★★★★
12 You're Missing ★★★★★
13 The Rising ★★★★
14 Paradise ★★★★
15 My City Of Ruins ★★★★★

Released: July 30, 2002
Produced by: Brendan O'Brien
Recorded and mixed at: Southern Tracks Recording, Atlanta, GA
Additional recording in: New Jersey, Tennessee, Hollywood
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (lead guitar, vocals, guitar, baritone guitar, harmonica); Roy Bittan (keyboards, piano, Mellotron, Kurzweil, pump organ, Korg M1, crumar); Clarence Clemons (sax, bk vocals); Danny Federici (Hammond B3, Vox Continental, Farfisa); Nils Lofgren (electric guitar, dobro, slide guitar, banjo, bk vocals); Patti Scialfa (vocals); Garry Tallent (bass); Steven Van Zandt (electric guitar, bk vocals, mandolin); Max Weinberg (drums); Soozie Tyrell (violin, background vocals); Brendan O'Brien (hurdy gurdy, glockenspiel, orchestra bells); Larry Lemaster (cello); Jane Scarpantoni (cello); Nashville String Machine; Asuf Ali Khan and group; The Alliance Singers; The Miami Horns
Highest chart position: UK 1 US 1

THE RISING
BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN
HIS FIRST STUDIO ALBUM
WITH THE E STREET BAND
SINCE BORN IN THE U.S.A.

LONESOME DAY
SIDE 1 INTO THE FIRE
WAITIN' ON A SUNNY DAY
NOTHING MAN
SIDE 2 COUNTIN' ON A MIRACLE
EMPTY SKY WORLDS APART
LET'S BE FRIENDS (SKIN TO SKIN)
FURTHER ON (UP THE ROAD)
SIDE 3 THE FUSE MARY'S PLACE
YOU'RE MISSING SIDE 4 THE RISING
PARADISE
MY CITY OF RUINS
Produced by Brendan O'Brien
www.brucespringsteen.net

THE
BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN
SIDE 1
LONESOME DAY
INTO THE FIRE
WAITIN' ON A
SIDE 3
FURTHER ON
(UP THE ROAD)
THE FUSE
MARY'S PLACE
BIEM

9/11 obituaries, drawn especially to the tributes to the EMS units, the cops, the firemen, the ambulance crews, the paramedics, the rescue teams who'd died bringing people out of the towers. Out of a total of 411 emergency workers who perished, 341 were fire-fighters. Of that second number, 158 were from Monmouth County in New Jersey, where Springsteen had lived on a large spread in Colts Neck since moving back to Jersey following a long stretch in Los Angeles. As Springsteen would recall, you couldn't drive anywhere in Monmouth in the weeks after 9/11 without seeing a funeral, candlelight vigils, evidence everywhere of mourning.

What Springsteen also did in the aftermath of the attacks was call the bereaved, to speak to them personally, offer sympathy, to share their grief and their memories of those they had lost. To find out something more than just the names of some of the people who'd been taken and to feed their stories into the songs he was writing for what would become *The Rising*, his first album of new material since …*Tom Joad* in 1995 and his first with the E Street Band at full strength since *Born In The USA* eighteen years previously.

There would have been a symmetry in the group coming together again, heeding Springsteen's call to record a new album commemorating the events of September 11. But Springsteen, after the years of sometimes bitter estrangement, had reconvened the band in 1999 for the Reunion Tour, on which they had blasted out their old hits with a brawny vitality that Springsteen was happy enough with to put out the *Live In New York City* album

Springsteen was also encouraged enough by that reunion tour to want to make his next album with the band he'd ditched after *Tunnel Of Love*. He had in fact already written a couple of songs during the tour with the new album in mind, including "Further On (Up The Road)", whose lyric extolled the virtues of enduring friendship.

But as keen as he was to make the album with the E Street Band happen, Springsteen was sure that whatever they did together now should not sound like anything they'd done before. He needed the band to sound different. To which end, Brendan O'Brien, best known for his work with Pearl Jam, was brought in to draw up a new sonic strategy, rethinking the way they sounded on record.

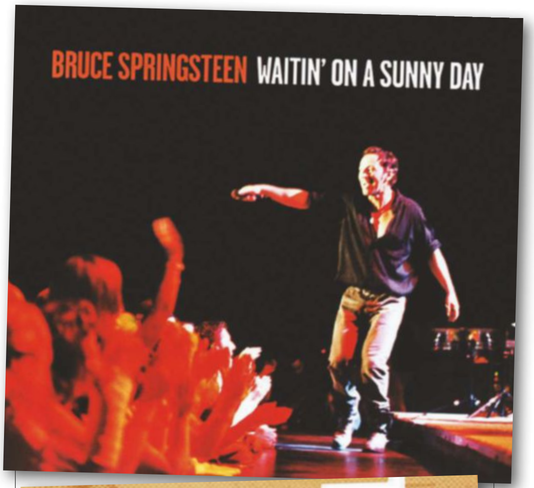
This was both a boldly intuitive and astutely pragmatic move on Springsteen's part and would prove crucial to the success of *The Rising*. Even at their most restrained – on the desolate stretches of *Darkness…* or *The River*, say – there had always been a kind of rock'n'roll triumphalism about the E Street Band. A seemingly inevitable drift on the band's part towards the overwrought would have been inappropriate on what, post-September 11, would turn out to be an album so preoccupied with loss, loyalty, sacrifice and duty.

You could hear the differences in the band's sound wrought by O'Brien straightaway on *The Rising* with "Lonesome Day", the album's opening track. It was recognisably the E Street Band. They couldn't in fact be mistaken for anyone else. At the same time, it didn't sound like the E Streeters as they'd been heard so many times before. Nearly 20 years earlier, on a comparable track like "Glory Days", the declamatory fanfare shriek of Danny Federici's keyboards would have been disconcertingly dominant. Here, however, O'Brien relocated the band's entire instrumental lineup. Federici and Roy Bittan were lower in the mix. What we had instead was the band's formidable three-guitar frontline – Springsteen, Nils Lofgren and

BOSSFACTS

★ *The Rising* debuted at No 1 on the US chart, and shifted over half a million copies in the US on its first week of sale alone

★ "The Rising" was something of a rallying call for US Democrats, and was heavily used by John Edwards, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in their 2008 nomination campaigns



Steve Van Zandt – spread across an aural canvas much enhanced by the prominence of Soozie Tyrell's violin and Larry Lemaster's cello. Thanks to O'Brien's redeployments, they were much less bludgeoning. More elegant, if you like. There was, yes, a lightness of touch not always apparent in the albums of yore.

"Lonesome Day" also presented a panoramic overview of much that followed, the emotional topography of *The Rising* mapped out here in a song filled with doubt, uncertainty and fear. *"Hell's brewin', dark sun's on the rise,"* Springsteen sang ominously, anticipating a looming calamity, a hard rain coming. *"This storm'll blow through by and by,"* he then added, and the promise, courageously made, of better times beyond all this current grim turmoil is thematically central to what Springsteen had to say to the listening world on *The Rising*.

Although many of the album's 15 songs were written quickly in the immediate aftermath of September 11, the actual events of that day were usually addressed allusively, by intimation rather than specific description. Only the title track, in fact, put us inside the inferno, on a song written from the point of view of a doomed fireman or rescue worker that rhapsodically evoked the ecstasy of martyrdom and self-sacrifice (on the album, it was adroitly followed by "Paradise", a beautiful ballad partly about the self-immolation of a suicide bomber, acoustic and slide guitars and synthesiser creating an atmosphere of an eerie if temporary calm).

They were everywhere on *The Rising*, but the album was not eventually so much about 9/11's many dead and how they died, but those who survived them, their grief and bewilderment and anger and confliction. As much as Springsteen clearly admired the selfless heroism of those who gave their lives, there was nothing anyone could say that they would hear. Springsteen's most audible sympathy was with the living, the bereaved, whose lives went on but would forever be altered, how they would have to learn to live with loss and daily be reminded of that part of their lives torn from them.

"Into The Fire" and "You're Missing", two of *The Rising*'s greatest songs came from this place of lonely grief. "Into The Fire" was the first song written by Springsteen after 9/11, and he had originally elected to debut it on the September 21 *America: A Tribute To Heroes* telethon before choosing to play "My City In Ruins", an earlier song, actually inspired by the increasing dereliction of his beloved Asbury Park. *"The sky was falling and streaked with blood,"* Springsteen's unnamed protagonist sang over Nils Lofgren's elegiac dobro phrasings and Tyrell's distant fiddle. *"I heard you calling me then you disappeared into dust…"* From this hymnal opening, the track blossomed with the introduction of the band and Tyrell's scything violin into a liturgical anthem, the repetition of elemental phrases – *"May your strength give us strength/May your faith give us faith/May your hope give us hope/May your life bring us love"* – a lyrical strategy repeated on key songs throughout the record.

"You're Missing" – inspired by Springsteen's conversations with Suzanne Berger – was a catalogue of absence that illuminated the singular misery of another anonymous survivor, reminded at every turn of who she's lost. *"Coffee cups on the counter, jackets on the chair/Papers on the doorstep, but you're not there,"* Springsteen sang over a forlorn backing of violin and keyboards, the repetition of words and music articulated a terrible desolation.

Springsteen's audible sympathy here was with the living, 9/11's bereaved, whose lives went on but would be forever altered

Elsewhere and in similarly mordant mood, Springsteen gave voice, briefly, on "Empty Sky" to a common anger – *"I want an eye for an eye"* – without ever descending into numbskull jingoism. "Nothing Man", meanwhile, written as early as 1994 and possibly about a veteran of the first Gulf War, was about a hero who didn't feel like one at all, consumed with guilt at his own survival, perhaps at the expense of others.

Not all of the songs were coloured by such evident gloom. “”Waitin' On A Sunny Day", "Countin' On A Miracle", "Let's Be Friends (Skin To Skin)" and "Mary's Place" were all musically upbeat – a mix of familiar elements, including Spector, Motown and the white New York soul of The Young Rascals. They were largely taken as evidence of Springsteen's boundless optimism, which made them sound a little empty-headed. They were, in fact, again full of doubt and apprehension, not a little desperate, despite their irresistible breeziness.

THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ **"Springsteen's attempt to offer illumination and inspiration amid that darkness. It is a brave and beautiful album of humanity, hurt and hope from the songwriter best qualified to speak to and for his country."**

SARFRAZ MANZOOR, UNCUT, SEPTEMBER 2002

The song structures here cleverly played on a nostalgia for a more innocent time when music like this seemed to always be on the radio, blasting out on long summer evenings when the world in many respects had seemed a better, safer place.

"Mary's Place", respectfully modelled on Sam Cooke's "Meet Me At Mary's Place", was in fact a glorious highlight. The long call-and-response climax, featuring Springsteen trading vocal lines with the soulful holler of The Alliance Singers, was as thrillingly euphoric as anything Springsteen had ever recorded. This kind of thing over the years had come perhaps too easily to Springsteen, but here the joyousness seemed genuinely hard-won, again underpinned by the question the record repeatedly asked: "Tell me how do you live broken-hearted?"

The album's most radical departures came a couple of songs apart in the disc's middle section. The epic "Worlds Apart" featured Springsteen sharing vocals with the ecstatic ululations of qawwali singer Asif Ali Khan on a song about the possibly doomed relationship between an American soldier and a Muslim woman that inspired some of Springsteen's most romantic writing. *"I'll meet you on the ridge, between these worlds apart,"* Springsteen sang, as the music thundered and writhed around him. *"I'll meet you on the ridge, between these worlds apart."* Less successful, perhaps, was the shuddering electronics and shrill carnality of "The Fuse", which lyrically mixed images of sex, death and religion.

"My City Of Ruins", the song with which he opened the *Tribute To Heroes* telethon, was revived as the closing track on *The Rising*, it was transformed into another of the album's transcendent hymns, a thing of rousing gospel beauty, whose aching melody borrowed knowingly from Curtis Mayfield's "People Get Ready", Springsteen's handsome lead vocal stirringly supported once again by The Alliance Singers. *"Rise up! Rise up!"* Springsteen preached as much as sang on the song's final, glorious choruses, the E Street Band and the gospel choir roaring with one voice, their message never more clear.

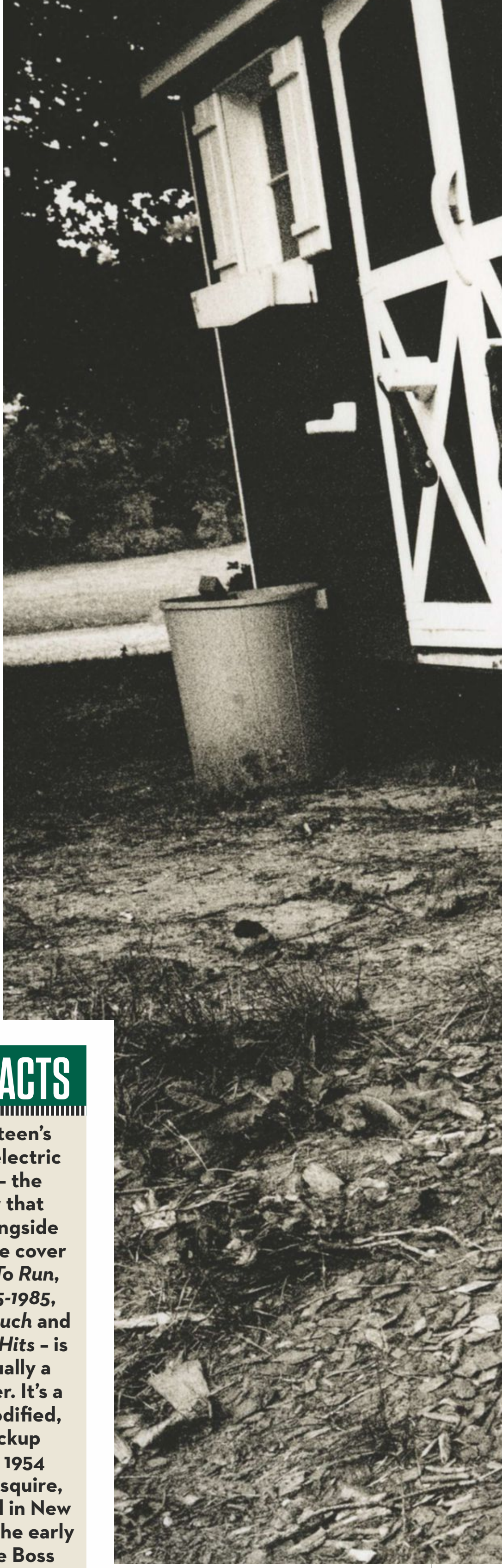
We shall overcome, they are telling us. God willing or not, we shall overcome. ✪

'I WANTED TO LIVE TO BE OLD, OLD AS HELL, Y'KNOW?'

A rare encounter on home territory, at Springsteen's farm in New Jersey. There, ADAM SWEETING gets the forensic lowdown on The Rising, the impact of 9/11 and the E Street reunion

TAKEN FROM
UNCUT
SEPTEMBER | 2002

TOM SHEEHAN



IF ALL YOU'VE EVER SEEN of New Jersey is Newark airport or the bits they show you in the opening sequence of *The Sopranos*, you'll have assumed it's a grimy jungle of factories, warehouses and malls interspersed with toxic waste dumps. It's the kind of place where they've given up trying to count the number of corpses stirred into the concrete buttresses holding up the freeways. But keep driving for a couple of hours away from Manhattan and, eventually, you discover why cars in Jersey have 'The Garden State' stamped on their number-plates. Once the dismal miles of urban blight have receded into the rear-view mirror, it's startling to find the landscape opening out into acres of woodland and lush green grassland, with the occasional picturesque lake thrown in for good measure.

Whatever mythology may surround New Jersey, Bruce Springsteen has been a substantial contributor. He was born in Freehold, NJ on September 23, 1949, a few miles inland from the seaside resort of Asbury Park which would become the laboratory for his songwriting and the birthplace of the E Street Band. One of his earliest songs was titled "Garden State Parkway Blues". The last song on his new album [*The Rising*] is called "My City Of Ruins", and you'd imagine it was about New York in the aftermath of September 11. In fact, he wrote it a couple of years ago about Asbury Park, a bedraggled and down-at-heel town living in hope of investment and redevelopment. Asbury Park now has a street dubbed Boss Boulevard, and the New Jersey legislature was grateful enough to one of its best-known sons to anoint "Born To Run" as the state's official rock anthem.

In the early '90s, Springsteen and his family – which now comprises wife Patti, two sons and a daughter – shuttled between homes in Jersey and California, where Springsteen's parents had gone to live in the late '60s, but lately they've shifted their centre of gravity back east. Most of the time, home is a farm in Colts Neck, nestling in the midst of gymkhana country in rural Jersey but not far from either Asbury Park or Freehold. As he once put it, "Where you come from is like your family and your best friend." Most of the farm's acres of pasture are screened from the main road by trees and hedges, though locals can sometimes catch a glimpse of Mr and Mrs Springsteen out horseriding.

As we turn in through the gate and scrunch up the gravel driveway towards the house, Springsteen saunters out across the front lawn to say hi. In a loose-fitting shirt, jeans and motorcycle boots, he looks more like the guy who's come to grease the gearbox on the tractor than the neighbourhood rock'n'roll superhero. The sun is searing down under a perfect blue sky, so he leads the way indoors where the climate is controlled and the fridge is packed with cold drinks.

"My friend, you are experiencing a classic Jersey summer's day," he announces with proprietorial bonhomie.

We settle back in a couple of chairs in the living room, with mineral water and an ice bucket on the table. The room is cool and comfortable, furnished in downhome Jersey Rustic rather than designer minimalism or arthouse chic.

"This area has been quite a sanctuary for me over the years," Springsteen reflects. "I'd say we have as relatively normal a life as possible under the circumstances – where everybody knows your music and who you are – but you can go to the carnival, you can go to the circus and nobody really bothers you. You can go to the boardwalk on a jammed Saturday night where there's a thousand people there and it's fine. People will look and say, 'Hello, how you doing?', it's all very do-able without much hassle, y'know?"

The upstanding citizen, he's happy to be on call for collecting the local kids from school and ferrying them home or to sports meetings. He plays coach to his eldest son Evan's baseball team. Sometimes on Halloween, he and Patti invite the Boy and Girl Scouts to their house. "Just regular stuff, y'know," he shrugs. "It's nothing unusual."

Even when his fame reached hysterical dimensions during the *Born In The USA* period in the mid-'80s, Springsteen always tried to keep at least one boot planted on the ground. In LA at the shrieking zenith of Bossmania, he once amazed Tom Petty by strolling down to Tower Records on Sunset Blvd to load up with new waxings. He even paid for them himself.

"You have to make a point of behaving like a human being," ponders the mature tunesmith. "I understand people who feel uncomfortable at a certain point with the amount of notoriety and attention. On one hand, obviously, you go out and you ask for it, you shake your butt in front of 20,000 people and part of the artist thing is that artists are narcissistic and self-involved and ego-driven and bottomless to some degree in their needs and what they want. That comes with the turf, I believe."

This prompts one of many outbursts of wheezy laughter. When Springsteen's funny bone gets tickled, he can sound incongruously like Dick Dastardly's dog, Muttley.

"So the question is, 'OK, that's me, but how do I manage those things? Do I manage them

BOSSFACTS

Springsteen's famous electric guitar – the Fender that stars alongside him on the cover of *Born To Run*, *Live 1975-1985*, *Human Touch* and *Greatest Hits* – is not actually a Telecaster. It's a much-modified, two-pickup 1953 or 1954 Fender Esquire, purchased in New Jersey in the early '70s. The Boss has often called it "the best I have ever played"

well?' In the end it's the measure of your ability to deal with the whole thing. I've met people who are nervous about going out for one reason or another, but what we did was always kind of 'Hail brother!', you know? I think it transferred over to some of the people who listen to us and so they give you a reasonable amount of space. There's really nothing to it. You may have to insist on it slightly – 'I'm gonna do this no matter what' – but particularly in the past decade or so, when I've been less in the limelight, it's just very easy and manageable."

Naturally, there's a little sleight of hand involved. There's a discreet security cordon around the Springsteens, and nobody gets close to the house without submitting to a brisk once-over from the guards. The estate is also protected by any number of unseen electronic safeguards. After recent events in America, precautions are mandatory.

Does he worry about kidnapping or terrorism?

"Well, it's one of those things. A little girl was kidnapped near here not long ago. It was some people who'd moved down from the city and she was on the lawn and luckily they got her back, and it had been done by somebody who was very… misguided, y'know? But it comes with the job a little bit. There's a certain level of security consciousness, and I do take extra precautions that a normal guy doesn't when it comes to my family and that sort of thing."

THE REASON SPRINGSTEEN has allowed *Uncut* to cross his perimeter is to put the word out about his new album, *The Rising*. While it would be an over-simplification to say the disc is exclusively 'about' the events of September 11, what happened that day and the aftershocks that continue to ripple out from it delivered a powerful jolt to Springsteen's creative processes. Among the album's themes you can pick out loss, faith, incomprehension, fear and hope, and even some all-join-hands celebration. As much as

CONTINUES OVER »

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anything, the songs reflect the effort involved in trying to adjust to a world where the things you thought were stable and unchanging might suddenly split open to reveal a howling void beneath.

"To me, it feels as rocky as any time since the Cuban missile crisis," Springsteen reckons. "I don't know if we've lived in as volatile a moment since that time, a moment where it feels like there's a lot of forces loose in the world that could go either way. There's a tremendous need right now for good leadership and I'm not sure I see it out there, so it's a very, very volatile moment in world history without a doubt.

"I'm certainly concerned, and I know my kids are frightened. They go 'The terrorists! The terrorists!' They take it in, and it's become as much a part of their childhood language as the atom bomb was for us in the '50s, and diving under the school desk, y'know? My son's always saying, 'What if there's a terrorist at the movies?' I'd have to go back there to remember a particular time in recent history when it's felt like this."

The perilous and lopsided state of the planet had a galvanising effect on his working methods. The man who once ground his way through 5,000 interminable studio hours while dragging *Born In The USA* to completion, and who recorded 60 songs en route to whittling down to the final 20 which made it onto 1980's *The River*, found himself galloping ahead at breakneck speed.

"With the exception of two or three songs that I had already, the body of the record was probably written between September and... we finished up in May – about five or six months," he recalls. "The songwriting itself was not time-consuming. The songs formed themselves pretty quickly and I had a process where I'd demo them pretty fast because I have a studio set up – a room like this, a living room – and it enabled me to see if it was a good song. That helped me weed through a lot of different ideas I had. But the songs were written quickly."

For Boss-o-philes, the big news is that *The Rising* is the first studio album he has made with the E Street Band since *Born In The USA* in 1984, although combinations of E Streeters appeared on 1987's *Tunnel Of Love*. Aside from a couple of isolated episodes, band and Boss didn't perform together between the end of 1988 and spring 1999, with the reunion preserved on last year's *Live In New York City*. After such a protracted separation, Springsteen knew they had to take at least one step up from where they'd left off. Where the live album, *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* (1995) and 1998's archive-trawl *Tracks* were all credited to the co-production duo of Springsteen and long-serving studio sidekick Chuck Plotkin, this time he felt the need for fresh thinking and some different hands on the tiller.

Enter Brendan O'Brien, whose production and mixing skills have made him studio guru *du jour* for a swarm of cutting-edge hard rock bands, from Pearl Jam and Soundgarden to Korn, Limp Bizkit, Rage Against The Machine and Stone Temple Pilots. Not to mention the more lived-in likes of Bob Dylan, Aerosmith and Mick Jagger.

"I'd heard Brendan's records in the mid-'90s," says Springsteen, "and they were just powerful rock records, y'know, like Pearl Jam. I just thought they sounded really good. I'd probably been thinking about working with somebody else for five or so years. After the tour, I'd recorded with the E Street Band for a couple of weekends in the studio. Everybody sounded great, but it wasn't quite what I felt was gonna be called for if I was gonna make a record with the band again. I felt it had to live up to the history of work we'd done, and I knew I didn't know how to do that."

Bruce kicked it around with his manager and sometime co-producer Jon Landau, who also felt he wasn't sufficiently well versed in current studio techniques to climb back into the producer's chair.

"We just got to a place where my abilities as a producer had reached their limits," Springsteen admits. "I was not in the studio regularly enough or recording enough different kinds of music. The sound of things changes every eight to 10 years, just the sound of records on the radio – the way the drums sound, the way the voice is treated – and those were the things I didn't know a lot about. I said I can't do justice to the band at this point by producing this thing myself or with Jon, so we said let's meet some other people. We knew we'd do a fine job on our own if we had to, but let's meet some other people and see what their ideas are."

A meeting was duly set up with O'Brien, and Springsteen dug out some demos of a couple of unrecorded songs, including "Nothing Man" and "Further On (Up The Road)", which would both eventually find their way onto *The Rising*. Both had been written prior to the unwelcome arrival of Al-Qaeda over lower Manhattan. O'Brien listened, liked what he heard, and began to form a mental picture of what a Springsteen/E Street album ought to sound like in 2002.

"Really, it just came down to, 'We'd like to record some good songs if we can and we'd like it to be exciting'," says Springsteen, "and basically he said 'Yeah'. He said, 'I have a studio down south and I like to work there, but I can work anywhere,' so I said, 'Let's work where you work and where you're comfortable.' We made a date. He came back one other time and I'd demoed 'Into The Fire', I had a funky little demo of it at the time, and I had 'You're Missing', and together we demo'd that and we worked together. It was something I hadn't done in a long time, to really collaborate over the structure and creation of one of my songs – I was used to doing all that myself. So we'd say, 'Oh, how about this in the bridge? How about this chord? How about we move this here? How about we wait this long?' Brendan is a musician himself, he's very musical and he had a lot of good ideas, so we went down south to Georgia and went into the studio."

Bruce Springsteen and Jon Landau, ca. 1974, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

BOSSFACTS

E Street Radio, a 24-hour station playing nothing but Springsteen, was launched by the Sirius Satellite group in 2005

© JEFF ALBERTSON/CORBIS

BEFORE YOU COULD say "Rosalita", the sparks started flying on E Street. "We played 'Into The Fire' two or three times. We came out, sat down, and in about 20 seconds I realised this was my guy, y'know? The band sounded like the band, but not like I'd heard them before, and that was what I was looking for. I wanted it to be like 'this is the way we sound right now', something that my audience who have been following me for years will recognise and it will also be new for them. That was it, it was what I was looking for. I said, 'Well, as long as I can write some songs'...and I had two good ones there. I'd also written a couple of good ones on the last tour, "American Skin" and "Land Of Hope And Dreams", so I said, 'Well, y'know, I think I can find my rock voice.' For a while I wasn't sure if I could find that voice again, because I knew I didn't want it to be the voice from *Born In The USA*, which was really the last time I sang that way."

As the sessions developed and they began to feel at home in Southern Tracks Recording in Atlanta, Springsteen found he didn't really need to worry. The songs he was writing arrived carrying their own sets of instructions about how they wanted to be performed and arranged. In the weird atmosphere of trauma and disorientation in the post-September 11 fallout, he found himself acting virtually as a receiver of messages flashing in from his own subconscious or from out of the disturbances in the collective ether.

"I think the second or third week in September I'd written 'Into The Fire' for a telethon [*America: A Tribute To Heroes*] they had here in the States after 9/11, and I was gonna sing it on the telethon, but instead I sang a song I already had called 'My City Of Ruins'. Then I wrote 'You're Missing', then after that I woke up one night and I had this song, 'The Fuse', and so all of a sudden you have elements of the story you're compelled to tell at a certain moment. That you're kind of asked to tell. Then you look at it and listen to it and it begins to say, y'know, there's just a wide variety of emotional elements to make it thoughtful and complete, and the songs kind of present themselves as such and in that fashion.

"It's not necessarily linear and it's not necessarily directly literal – in fact, hopefully it's not really literal. That was something I was trying not to do. I wanted to feel emotionally in that context but not directly literal, though on some songs I was gonna be a little more literal than on others. Those songs kind of anchored the theme of the record, so when you get to the other ones you start to look into it and check the verses and realise it's a piece of the whole thing. That was pretty much how it developed, very instinctively. It wasn't over thought-out."

In other words, it was the polar opposite of the songs on *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, which were long, evolving narratives painstakingly assembled from fine detail and closely observed characterisation. The only one of the new songs vaguely in that vein is "Nothing Man", apparently a vignette of a small-town character who becomes a local hero after some unspecified act of heroism.

"Right, and that I wrote in 1994," Springsteen nods. "This album is the opposite end of the lyrical spectrum. There's detail, but it was a different type of writing than I've done in a while. It was just sort of pop song writing or rock song writing, y'know?

"I was trying to find a way to tell the story in that context. One of the things I learnt on some of my earlier records where I tried to record the band... for instance, on *Nebraska*, immediately the band played those songs they overruled the lyrics. It didn't work. Those two forms didn't fit. The band comes in and generally makes noise, and the lyrics wanted silence, y'know? They make arrangement, and the lyrics wanted less arrangement. The lyrics wanted to be at the centre and there was a minimal amount of music. The music was very necessary but it wanted to be minimal, and so with *The Rising* I was trying to make an exciting record with the E Street Band which I hadn't done in a long time, so that form was kind of driving me."

With O'Brien a reassuring presence in the control booth, Springsteen felt able to focus on writing and performing. "Brendan had a particular, distinct aesthetic point of view where he said, 'Yeah, I think this is working on this, but this makes it sound like that,' y'know? So this was a situation where I trusted his viewpoint very intensely, and I had a lot of faith in where he thought the thing was going to go soundwise.

> "We got to a place where my abilities as a producer reached their limits. I couldn't do justice to the band"

"The guitars were brought way up front, the keyboards were put in a different spot, things sounded a little different. We used a variety of different tape loops, and we had a lot of different found sounds going on – everything to sort of not go to the normal thing that we'd done in the past. The essential thing was to get the band to feel sonically fresh. He knew exactly what to do there, so I got to kind of sit back and do the singing and the playing and the songwriting."

ALTHOUGH ON OCCASIONS Springsteen has seen his music being claimed by politicians from either end of the spectrum – Ronald Reagan and his Democratic rival Walter Mondale both tried to steal some of his *Born In The USA* thunder in 1984 – his focus has remained resolutely on the personal and the particular. On that occasion Springsteen was careful to distance himself and his work from both candidates. Eighteen years later, he feels no more inclined to take political sides, and earlier this year he rebuffed efforts by an activist group called Independence For New Jersey to put his name forward as a candidate for the US Senate. He quoted General William Tecumseh Sherman, who refused to seek the presidency in 1884. "If nominated, I will not run," declared The Boss, tongue presumably in cheek. "If elected, I will not serve."

Hence, his new songs deal with individual emotions and spiritual concerns rather than American foreign policy or the disastrous incompetence of the FBI. Besides, he's well aware that nothing will go out of date more quickly than an album picking over the debris of yesterday's news. However, he has made an explicit gesture of looking beyond the US with "Worlds Apart", a song with a pungent Eastern flavour thanks to a guest appearance by the Pakistani qawwali musician Asif Ali Khan and his band. Under Chuck Plotkin's supervision, they recorded their contribution in a Los Angeles studio hooked up to the sessions in Georgia via an ISDN link.

"I came up with 'Worlds Apart' and I started to fool with some mid-Eastern scales in some of the background parts," Springsteen explains. "Asif Ali Khan happened to have a record coming on Def Jam, and they happened to be in LA. Via the ISDN line we were able to have a session across country, and they sang and played beautifully. It was very exciting to hear that sound in the middle of a rock song. I was trying to look outside the United States and move the boundaries of the record in some fashion. I think the song started when I saw a picture of the women in Afghanistan with the veils off a few days after they'd routed the Taliban out of Kabul, and their faces were so beautiful."

Doesn't the fear hawkish commentators will accuse him of giving comfort to the enemy?

"Anybody can say anything," he says with a what-the-hell gesture. "Nothing surprises me at this point. People interpret things all kinds of ways – it was just great Pakistani musicians and they sang beautifully. Who knows? Like you say, people come at things six ways from Sunday, but I think if someone listens to it, it just worked really well musically and they were great people and great musicians."

THE ALBUM OPENS with the stormy rumble of "Lonesome Day", which Springsteen conceived as a curtain-raiser and scene-setter for what follows. Right away, you can hear what he means about O'Brien's effect on the band's sound. Where there could sometimes be an end-of-the-pier quality about the E Streeters in the old days, this time the guitars bite like chainsaws chewing through a stack of pine logs, while the bass and drum bottom end is built like St Paul's Cathedral. And no sign of that in-house fave, the glockenspiel?

"Actually, there is a glockenspiel on the album," says Springsteen,

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BOSSFACTS

A 2006 episode of the US TV crime drama Cold Case used the lyrics of eight Springsteen songs to tell the story of a murder among a group of old high school friends. Series creator Meredith Stiehm initially wanted there to be no other dialogue in the programme

triumphantly. "Brendan played it on 'Into The Fire' and 'Waitin' On A Sunny Day'. He was going, 'I'm doing a Springsteen record! Damn right I'm gonna play the glockenspiel'."

For "Lonesome Day", however, the trusty glock was deemed surplus to requirements. "If you look at the first verse, it feels like it's a guy who's talking to his girl," the author points out. He sings the words quietly, fast-forwarding through them in his mind – "*'Baby once I thought I knew everything I needed to know about you… it's gonna be okay if I can just get through this lonesome day.'* Then bang, the second verse – *'Hell's brewin' dark sun's on the rise, this storm'll blow through by and by,'* so I switched right out of this personal thing to this sort of overall emotional mood and the feelings that were in the air here in the States around that time. But it works, because one thing works with the other and the second verse can come in on what was said in the first verse. The secret of the songwriting was to get personal first, then you sort of shade in universal feelings. That's what balances the songs. All experience is personal so you have to start there, and then if you can connect in what's happening with everyone, the universality of an experience, then you're creating that alchemy where your audience is listening to it, they're hearing what they're feeling inside and they're also feeling 'I'm not alone', you know? And that's what you're trying to do."

DESPITE THE TURBULENT context in which most of the songs were written, it's only intermittently that Springsteen allows specific references to come looming out of the fog of battle. "You're Missing" is a forlorn itemisation of loss, measured out in mundane household details (*"Coffee cups on the counter, jackets on the chair/Papers on the doorstep, but you're not there"*), while "Into The Fire" sounds as though Springsteen might have had the New York Fire Department in mind when he wrote it (*"I need your kiss, but love and duty called you some place higher/Somewhere up the stairs, into the fire"*). "Further On (Up The Road)" and "The Fuse" are both steeped in dread and a sense of gathering threat, though there's no attempt to locate them in a particular time or place. *"Got my dead man's suit, and my smilin' skull ring/My lucky graveyard boots, and a song to sing,"* runs the second verse of "Further On", evoking an image of The Boss as a kind of spectral balladeer stalking the margins of consciousness. In "The Fuse", as an ominous drumbeat tolls out the time, the singer restlessly shuffles images of death, religion and sex.

Binding many of the songs together, over and above any details of their subject matter, is a powerful sense of religious faith, with religious imagery cropping up in any number of them. "Paradise" deals with a life-after-death experience, and Allah even gets a namecheck in "Worlds Apart". "The Rising" itself, probably the most unabashed lump-in-the-throat rock anthem he's written since "Born In The USA", amounts to Springsteen's own Easter hymn with its repetition of the phrase *"a dream of life"* and its closing invocation – *"Come on up for the rising/Come on up, lay your hands in mine… Come on up for the rising tonight."* I found an Italian translation of the lyrics on the Internet, and the Italians call it "La Resurrezione". Then there's "My City Of Ruins", not so much a song as a prayer – *"I pray for your love, Lord, with these hands…"*

"I've had 'My City Of Ruins' for a couple of years almost," Springsteen explains. "I was going to play it in Asbury Park for a Christmas show. Asbury, of course, has been struggling for a very long time, and the town's now on the verge of being redeveloped, so there was a moment when there was a lot of hope and excitement about it. It's a beautiful city, its basic design is really quite lovely, so there was excitement about it. I was playing in Convention Hall in Asbury or doing something for some different organisations in the town, so that was when I wrote it. Then, when I played it on the 9/11 telethon, people made a connection with that event, but it was written quite a bit before. It felt appropriate to sing it that night, but it was written quite a bit previously.

"It's a gospel song. It's like a lot of my things, like 'The Promised Land', or I had a song on the live album called 'Land Of Hope And Dreams'… they're all fundamentally gospel-rooted, or blues- and gospel-rooted. It seemed like that element was going to be a significant element of the record in some fashion. I didn't sit down and set out to write this or that, but just as it unfolded, as I say, the story you're telling asks for certain things, and it asks for help in discerning meaning from chaotic or cataclysmic events. I think people are asking themselves, 'Where do I fit into this? What happened? Where did my husband go? Where did my wife go? What's that about? What can I do about it? What do I do now? Where are they?' I think all those questions, if you go through any sort of real shattering loss, become a constant part of your life.

"I'm sure, for the rest of your life, those are questions that you're answering every day, and that never completely goes away. So the songwriters and the storytellers in general are people who attempt to assist people in contextualising some of that experience. And not explaining, really, because I don't know of an explanation, but sorting through things emotionally and locating ties that people have that continue to bind even in the face of the events of that day. I think I went in search of those things on many of the songs."

I wondered what it had been like in the Springsteen household on that Tuesday, as the news unfolded. "I'm sure it was the same every place, everybody tells the same story to some degree. Sitting around the television. We're about five minutes from a bridge that you cross over where these two rivers meet, and there's a bridge where the Twin Towers stand right in the centre of it, and it's only 10 or 15 miles by water from here so it's quite close. The whole horizon line goes red and hazy if the wind's blowing in this direction and the towers are always there, and on that particular day they were gone, y'know? I think what was unusual about living here at the time was… I think it was 150 people from Monmouth County [*where he lives*] or a little more who died. People knew people. In the surrounding communities there were quite a few people affected. You knew this woman and her husband, someone else's son, someone else's brother.

"In the following weeks if you were driving towards the beach or something, if you drove by the Catholic church there was a funeral every day. Then people got together and there were some shows done and benefits and candlelight vigils and a wide variety of ways that people were trying to sort through what happened. I don't know what it was like in the middle of the country or on the West Coast, but here it was very real."

IF EVER THERE was a rock star who embodied the values of community, dependability and a continuing dialogue with his audience, it's Springsteen, so he and the band were happy to get stuck into some morale-boosting projects.

"Yeah, we did shows in Asbury and in Red Bank near here, and a couple of places in the area. Garry Tallent put on a two-night show, it was fun – I played, Joan Jett, DJ Fontana came up with Sonny Burgess from Memphis and it was just a wide variety of people who came up and played and chipped in. It was a very interesting show. Then the last couple of years we've done Christmas concerts in Asbury where I front Max Weinberg's band, and a lot of the E Street guys show up, and we get the horn section from Southside Johnny and some singers and we have a big 30-piece band onstage and we throw a big Christmas party basically. This year that was a part of it. Garland Jeffreys played, Elvis Costello came and sang a song, Bruce Hornsby – it was a lot of fun. I met many of the survivors and the wives, they'd come out and wanted to dance and have fun. They'd say, 'Thanks, we had a great time'."

This instinct to band together and try to find something to be hopeful about was another dimension Springsteen wanted to build into the new album. Despite the sombre nature of much of the subject matter, he has managed to smuggle in a couple of tracks that are as poppy and commercial as anything he's ever written. "Waitin' On A Sunny Day" is an easy-going stroll back to the classic pop Springsteen soaked up in his youth, with "a little Phil Spector and a little Rockpile" in the mix. "Let's Be Friends" he describes as "a combination of Sly Stone and Virginia beach music. Yeah, that's a nice groove, it's like a kids' singalong. What really makes it work is the Alliance Choir who are singing on it along with

> "The secret of the songwriting was to get personal first, then to shade in the universal feelings"

Patti [*Scialfa*] and Soozie Tyrell. When the chorus hits, it's just a very classic sound."

Talking about music, he stresses, isn't the same as hearing it. "I think listening to me sort of propound my ideas of what went into the songs is not the same, may I mention, as the listening experience!" he argues, amid laughter. "The band is playing hard, loud and with intensity, and the music itself is very bright for the most part. For the first time I made a record with the E Street Band in 18 years I wanted a record that was gonna be fun for people to listen to, and exciting, that people used the way people use rock records, which is either to clean your house to or to change your life if you want to, y'know? That was an essential element. Without that, the lyrics as they stand would not work. They work because they're embedded in music that is very life-affirming. That balance has been something I think I've struck in all my best songs, like my verses are always the blues and my choruses are gospel. You go to 'The Promised Land' or 'Badlands', they're based on the idea that your feet are grounded in the everyday, in the real world, but your spirit is reaching high."

The idea was the album wouldn't duck "all the hard questions", but it needed to stir listeners physically, too. "That's something the band and I do well and that had to be a part of it," he reasons. "The record needed to be filled with a certain sort of hopeful energy but the hope had to be earned, y'know? It couldn't just be platitudes or 'Everything's gonna be all right' or 'Things are gonna be better'. So if you look at a song like 'Mary's Place' – *'We're gonna have a party'*. Then you go back to the verses and see all the other stuff is in the verses, somebody trying to sort through what happened, and 'What's my place and where do I go tonight and how do I deal with this minute by minute and day by day?'"

September 21, 2001 America: A Tribute To Heroes show

BOSSFACTS

The first song that Springsteen learned to play on a guitar was The Beatles' version of "Twist And Shout". He has frequently played the song at live shows, including on the *Magic* tour in 2008, the number often forming part of the encore

"MARY'S PLACE" IS where the bar-band spirit of the E Street squad emerges most vividly on the album, but it acknowledges that decades have passed since the rowdier, less self-examining days of "Where The Bands Are" or "Out In The Street". It sounds like a celebration, but it isn't very far away from being a wake, either.

"I think that's what you saw at the time, people were making that effort to celebrate and it was helpful," says Springsteen. "The idea of the song was to capture that thing. I wanted it to really feel like home. It's a throwback to 'Rosalita' almost, and I wanted the band to feel the way people remembered that it felt at a certain time and I was singing a certain way. It comes up about three-quarters of the way through the record, right after 'The Fuse', which is really sonically different for us, and all of a sudden people would feel like, hey, that's your own pals putting their arms around you and you've got a place to go and somebody to talk to and be with. That's kind of what our band has been for people and what we've wanted to be for people over the years. The song comes up at a particular place on the record, it's that open-arms-of-home feeling."

Forensically-minded listeners may find it interesting to consider the piece as another of Springsteen's "Mary" songs. Since "Mary Queen Of Arkansas" on his debut album, *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ*, Marys – or is it just Mary? – have cropped up consistently down the years. In "Thunder Road", it's Mary who *"dances across the floor as the radio plays"*, while the narrator "got Mary pregnant" in "The River". She's back again in "Straight Time" from *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* – *"Mary's smiling but she's watching me out of the corner of her eye"*. Time for a doctoral thesis on "The Name Mary In The Works Of Bruce Springsteen", perhaps?

So who is she this time, Bruce? Mary from "Thunder Road"? The Virgin Mary?

"Yeah, I've used that name a lot of times," he grins. "I'm sure it's the Catholic coming out in me, y'know? That was always the most beautiful name. I used it in 'Thunder Road', I used it on *Tom Joad*, and what happens is, if you kind of set up a continuing… it's not necessarily the same person, and there's a little continuum that occurs for the people who are watching or listening. The name drifts through your body of work and leaves a trail of its own about where you've been and where you're going. It comes up in 'Mary's Place' and, really, you're right, it's like, 'Well, where's the party actually being held?' It could be here or there, and who is saying, 'Meet me at Mary's place?' That was part of it, too. Whose voice is that?

"It comes up again at the end of 'The Rising', *'I see you Mary in the garden of a thousand sighs'*. Once again, that's like someone's wife, or it could be a religious vision. That the songs call for a blurring of those ideas. They had to meld in a certain way, the religious with the everyday, because that's one of the only emotional responses to that experience, I think. So it floats through the record in a lot of ways."

These are daunting issues to address on a rock album, and Springsteen set himself his sternest examination on the title track. Above the roaring blowtorch

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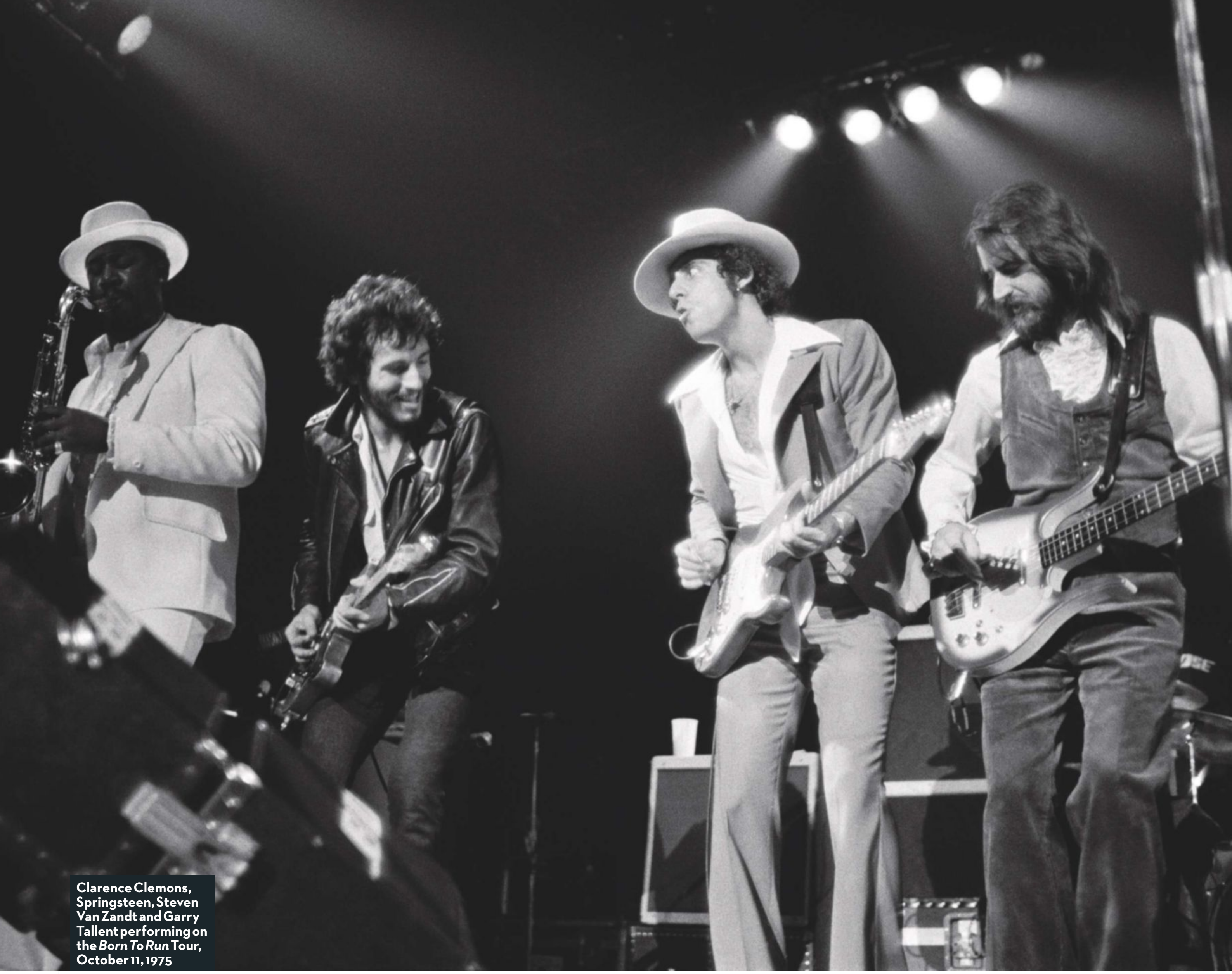
KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE



Clarence Clemons, Springsteen, Steven Van Zandt and Garry Tallent performing on the *Born To Run* Tour, October 11, 1975

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS

blast of the new O'Brien-ised E Street Band sound, the lyrics are part mantra, part prayer, part mystical contemplation, part horrified onlooker.

"I think it's a natural image of sacrifice," he reflects. "Once again moving towards religious imagery to explain some of the day's experiences. It's unavoidable to some degree because of the nature and the type of sacrifice that occurred. I got down towards the end of the record and I think I was searching for the voice of someone who died, and I wanted to have a voice that addresses the living. So I just sort of imagined the main character basically… I dunno, speaking to his wife. Who would you want to speak to? Your wife, and you'd think of your children. And then just those left at large, I think. The different verses move slowly towards that kind of crossing-over point. 'The Rising' – that was it, that was the moment when the souls rise."

His voice has been growing steadily quieter as he takes the measure of his subject. The weight of it is starting to bear down on the entire room, even on this pristine summer afternoon. He pauses to drink some water. Sometimes he'll rephrase his sentences two or three times, as he searches for the exact nuance of meaning. "In the beginning, the first verse is kind of disorientation and 'Where am I?' It starts, *'Can't see nothing in front of me, can't see nothing coming up behind… All I can feel is the chain that binds me'* – the links with whatever you might wanna call it – duty, love, comradeship, the fear – that keep people going. The song moves on. The second verse is just where the person came from, *'Left the house this morning… wearin' the cross of my calling.'* Well, that's just 'this is your job', y'know? It's the same one you've worn every day and today these are its responsibilities and this is what it's asking. The bridge of the song is a moment when I think the singer realises that his mortality is at hand, and then in the last verse I imagine him speaking to his wife or a religious vision of some sort, *'See Mary in the garden…'* It seemed to me that's one of the things you'd be thinking about, and the desire for a return to a physical intimacy – *'Feel your arms around me'* – the physical self. The fear of losing that physical self, *'May I feel your blood mix with mine'*, the desire to sustain the physical intimacy.

"Then, *'A dream of life comes to me like a catfish dancin' on the end of my line.'* That was a funny line – the catfish line popped out of my head, 'cos I fish out here once in a while and there's that moment when bing!, y'know, you're suspended between life and death, incredible life and a moment of death, and really I think the rest of the song turns into this mantra, *'Sky of blackness and sorrow, sky of love'*. It's sort of the yin-yang of just what is. *'Sky of mercy, sky of fear, sky of memory, sky of emptiness, sky of fullness.'* I think it's the awareness of what is about to be lost, *'A dream of life, dream of life, dream of life'* – repeat that over and over again. Just the magnitude of what you're leaving behind, what you're giving up, and a last chance to speak to people that matter to you.

"So that came up towards the end of the record. It was kind of a curtain on the whole thing. I think a lot of the other songs were moving towards that direction."

The bearded, frizzy-haired Springsteen who would hang around Madam Marie the fortune-teller's on the Asbury Park boardwalk probably never dreamt he'd end up writing his own version of the St Matthew Passion, but the roots of his new songs can be clearly discerned in his past songwriting. His willingness to engage with the spiritual and the metaphysical will probably be what strikes listeners most forcefully about *The Rising*, but it isn't a development which has sprung unexpectedly out of nowhere.

BOSSFACTS

The Rising **sold over two million copies in the US – Bruce's best-selling LP of new material since** ***Tunnel Of Love***

Ten years ago, the *Lucky Town* album concluded with "Souls Of The Departed" and "My Beautiful Reward", two songs distinctly preoccupied with the afterlife. *"Well this is a prayer for the souls of the departed/ Those who've gone and left their babies brokenhearted"*, he sang in the former. The nuns who taught the young Bruce Frederick Springsteen at the St Rose Of Lima School in Freehold might consider they did a pretty good job of instilling Holy dread and the mysteries of Catholic ritual into the boy.

You can also trace a clear line between "My Beautiful Reward" and the new song, "Paradise". "Yeah, they share some of the same issues. That transition point between life and death. When I wrote 'Paradise', I was looking for something kind of really quiet, and I think it was the week there'd been the teenage girl suicide bombers. It was devastating, and so the first verse came out of thinking about that, the loss of life and the false paradise. Then I'd met a woman who had lost her husband at the Pentagon, and she came to Asbury one night, and they were just long-time fans, I guess. I think I was thinking of that woman when I wrote the song, which is why it switches from Virginia, because I wanted something that was outside the United States, the larger feeling of the effect of what's going on in the world outside the States. Again I thought, 'What do you miss?' You miss the physicalness and the ability to touch somebody.

"I've had people close to me who died. I remember when I was young, that aching to touch the person again was very, very strong and it was very painful to realise that it just couldn't happen. And the last verse is a survivor's verse, where I think that your desire to join the people you've lost is very strong. You have the situation where the person goes to that river, it's the river of transition between life and death and they wade into it and they take themselves underneath.

"Somewhere in that netherworld they see the person and it kinda comes up with that last line – they're searching for the peacefulness that people feel comes with death and passing on, or with an imagined version of paradise that you'll attain, and they get close enough and they just see emptiness. There's a lot of different ways people could interpret it. I always felt it was, 'Hey, life is here. It's all you have and it's here and now.'

"In the last couple of lines the person swims to the surface and feels the sun. That was my last song of the record."

BOSSFACTS

Springsteen was honoured for his contribution to American culture at the Kennedy Centre in Washington in December 2009. Among several tributes, comedian and *The Daily Show* host Jon Stewart said, "I am not a music critic. Nor historian, nor archivist. I cannot tell you where Bruce Springsteen falls in the pantheon of the American songbook. I cannot illuminate the context of his work, or its roots in the folk and oral history traditions of our great nation. But I am from New Jersey. So, I can tell you what I believe. And what I believe is that Bob Dylan and James Brown had a baby. That child was Bruce Springsteen"

ONE OF THE trademarks of Springsteen's career has been the way it has advanced by careful, logical steps. If he's been through chaotic or depressive episodes in his life, he has made sure he did so away from microphones and beyond the reach of the paparazzi. His shrewdest creative device has been to use his own life as the raw material of his work, so as he gradually changes over the years, so do his songs. He has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and if he sometimes seems to have been hamstrung by excessive caution, his approach has ensured that he has avoided making a prancing buffoon of himself in the manner of a Rod Stewart, a Mick Jagger or even a George Michael.

Hence, despite the immediate circumstances of their composition, Springsteen is well aware that the new songs are "outgrowths of stories that I've written all along", as he puts it. "I've written about the everyday for a long time, and a certain sort of… for lack of a better word, heroism or nobility that I've felt that I witnessed in my life as a child among people in my neighbourhood and in my house. That was something that I felt wasn't being sung about at the time when I started to sing about it, and also it was just what mattered to me. It felt real, and those were the things I was moved to sing about. We're living at a time in the United States of certain events, y'know, and as a writer you respond to the events of the day.

"What happened last September was a very natural thing to write about, and there were a lot of obviously inspirational things happening at the time. You're trying to contextualise the event for yourself, I think that's where it starts. It starts with you trying to do it for yourself, and then in the process, because I learnt the language of songwriting and music, I try to communicate and hopefully do it for other people. I'm just doing something that's useful for me, and then hopefully in some fashion it's gonna be useful and will provide some service to my audience."

It seems incongruous that Springsteen's huge career should have grown from such unassuming, almost humdrum, acorns. The way he puts it, he almost makes it sound as if he's a musical plumber who comes round, with a pen behind his ear and a clipboard, to make sure you're getting your regular supply with no leaks or air blockages. But it's been his achievement to take the routines and small details of regular non-rock-star lives and sieve through them until he can separate out a hint of the epic.

Punk bands always used to drone on about removing the barriers between band and audience, but somehow Springsteen was able to persuade his audience, even after they'd been herded into a football stadium with people chucking firecrackers and mooing "Brooooooce!", that the bond they thought they felt to him and his music was real. Even after becoming the biggest white rock star on earth, he found ways to keep the relationship alive, whether it was through high-profile benevolent gestures or Amnesty International tours, or, perhaps more tellingly, by showing up unannounced at small clubs and thrashing out a few old rock'n'roll chestnuts, just because he wanted to.

A natural conservative (by character, rather than politically) in a medium which was, at one time at least, associated with anarchy and insurrection, Springsteen was always in it for the long run. Not the burn-out-and-fade-away type of guy at all.

"No, no!" he insists. "I wanted to live to be old, old as hell, y'know? I'm glad The Who can get onstage and still sing 'My Generation' now. I like seeing Marlon Brando alive and kicking. I understood the cult of death was always a very, very integral part of rock'n'roll myth, and possibly because there was the whole idea of the edge and the idea that music felt like life and death. It did feel like life and death, it still does feel like life and death to me, y'know, but it was something that for me and our band I interpreted differently. I didn't discount it and it's a part of a lot of my music, but I interpreted it differently and I think in an integrated fashion as a part of the work that I was doing, and fundamentally our story has always been, 'Hey, look, all we have is this, let's see what we can do with it.'"

> "I just wanted to be great, y'know. I wanted to live up to the people who'd been my heroes"

HE ATTRIBUTES HIS work ethic and his penchant for self-denial to his mother, Adele. A staunch Catholic from a Neapolitan family, the Zerillis, Mrs Springsteen was a hard-working secretary who shouldered the burden of keeping the household running when her husband was enduring his frequent periods of unemployment. When Springsteen talks about her, his face is lit by an expression of child-like amazement.

"I took after my mom in a certain sense. Her life had an incredible consistency, work work work every day, and I admired that greatly. I admired her ability to present herself. She would get up in the morning and the bathroom was near my bed, and I could hear the sound of her in the bathroom. The faucet would come on, the make-up kit come out, things clicking on the sink, and I just sat and listened to my mother in the act of getting ready CONTINUES OVER »

to present herself to the world. And then her high heels, and the sound they made when they left the house. I had a little balcony I used to sleep out on sometimes, and I'd hear her heels going up the street towards the office.

"The office was about two blocks into the centre of town and that was the sound of my mom walking to work, y'know, walking to work. I'd visit her at her job sometimes, and it was filled with men and women who seemed to have a purpose. They were presenting themselves in a certain fashion, and I found a lot of inspiration in those simple acts. It was part of what you gave to the town you lived in and your society and your family, and it was not necessarily easy to do. My mother had little babies. We needed breakfast, we needed dinner at the end of her eight-hour working day. We needed somebody to do our homework with us and the day was endless, y'know, and it was just simply performed daily, day in day out, without complaint. As I grew older I began to look at this as a noble thing, and I realised that there were many of these things going on constantly in my little town."

You'd have to guess that this idealistic, stained-glass vision of Adele Springsteen provided at least one template for her son's various Mary-figures. It might surprise his mother to learn that she was also a role model for the E Street Band. "The work part of what we did was intensely modelled on what she did, and the way she conducted herself on a daily basis," Springsteen insists. "It was like, 'Hey! We can't be terrible one night and good the next night. We've got to be good every night.' When somebody buys your ticket, it's your handshake, it's the old story, and they only have this night. They don't care if you're great the next night. What about tonight, y'know? I thought those things were real, and we took our fun very seriously.

"We went out there to throw a big party to make you laugh and dance and the band would act crazy onstage, but behind it was the idea also that you're providing an essential service of some sort. That unspoken promises are made between an audience and an artist, whether you say them or not, they're a part of the dialogue that comes with the turf. And it's a valuable dialogue, a valuable occupation, a valuable thing to do, and on top of that, hey, it's great fun and the pay is fabulous and we've had a lifetime of satisfying work. On our last tour, somebody came up to me and said, 'Hey, I saw you in '75, there was a show you did at this college.' I thought, why would somebody remember one night in 1975? And I said, 'Yeah, that was the idea, I was trying to make that night memorable.'

"That consistency, I felt, was a part of what we were about and what I wanted to be about. I wanted to be something you could depend upon, as best as I could. I was gonna have my screw-ups and make my mistakes and I was probably gonna do things you didn't want me to do, but fundamentally I was gonna be at least out there searching for that road." He pauses for another eruption of Bruceian laughter. "And so it continues."

But when he was, say, 25 and about to make *Born To Run*, did he have a clear idea of where he was heading and how he would develop?

"Well, I'd had success locally and I liked that. You got the attention from the girls. I made a few bucks, not much but I didn't need much, and I beat the 9-to-5 thing, which I was very interested in doing. I had no real practical skills and I wasn't book-smart at school, so I'd managed to learn this craft that was keeping me afloat. That excited me, and I knew I wanted to be a musician.

In 1973, the year of his first album

"Then, as time passed, we played to a lot of people and people applauded. We were pretty good. As we travelled around I said, 'Yeah, we're not only pretty good, we're better than a lot of these other guys I'm seeing,' and I'd put the radio on and I'd say, 'And I'm as good as a lot of these guys that are on the radio, too, so why shouldn't I be on the radio'? Anyway, I got to New York and I met Mike Appel [*first manager*], and it set the next series of things in motion where I was going to be a recording musician. After my first LP came out, I remember Mike called me and I said, 'How did we do?' He said, 'We didn't do very well, we sold about 20,000 records.' I said, '20,000 records! That's fabulous! I don't know 20,000 people. Who would buy a record by someone they have no idea about?'"

Gradually, it dawned on him that whatever success he was going to achieve would be determined by his own efforts. He was gripped by a single-minded will to succeed.

"I think I just wanted to be great, y'know, I wanted to be really as good as I could be, and I wanted to live up to the people who had been my heroes. It's like when Reggie Jackson got put into the Baseball Hall Of Fame, he says: 'It was great to be there that day, you don't care if your name's called first or second or tenth, but it's nice that somewhere on that long day when the list gets read off, somewhere in there they come to yours.' I think that was kinda my feeling – 'Gee, I'd like to be a part of this somehow.'

"When I think back on it, I thought I just wanted to play rhythm guitar, I didn't want to play lead guitar. You just want to be in the band and be part of that thing moving along, but then somewhere along the way that becomes intertwined with, of course, raving ambition, and you're trying to make the best, greatest rock record that could ever be made. You're trying to be the best and your ego pushes you, which is okay, that's how things roll. As long as all those things are managed in a fashion that allows you to survive and continue, and keeps you on a reasonable path, you know?"

IT WAS THE arrival of Jon Landau as his manager that guaranteed that Springsteen's potential would be converted into copper-bottomed, platinum-plated results. Landau declared that he had seen "rock'n'-roll's future", but when he saw Springsteen he knew he'd seen his own future, too. Left to his own devices, it's very possible that Springsteen might have allowed his heart to rule his head. In Landau's case, the equation is emphatically reversed. Doing business deals with Landau is reportedly like sticking your head in a bucket of piranhas, but there's no doubt he has played a pivotal role in sustaining Bruce's credibility and creativity.

"The main thing about Jon was he was somebody I could trust," Springsteen reports. "There were a lot of things I hated doing, business things, which I had proven terrible at before I met Jon. I wasn't even terrible at it, I just couldn't have cared less. I just wanted to be able to do what I wanted to do. Particularly when I was younger, I was really alienated by that part of it and I felt that any involvement in it was somehow not being true to my original ideals. So when Jon came along that whole thing was taken care of. I had a long period of time when I was pretty estranged from it, probably until well into my thirties, and he kept the boat afloat. He was a writer himself, and he managed because I needed a manager.

"We had a lot of discussions over the years about these issues, and where people went right and where people went wrong, and it was always based around, 'How do we do the best job this time out with the record?' It was so simple. He would say, 'Well, you can do this and play a hall this size and it can still be great.' He was constantly pushing the boundaries out for me a little bit, which I needed to do because I was fearful, I was very self-protective, and not

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

unwisely so because you need to be. You need to protect your work, your music and the identity that you've worked hard to present."

It was this belief that drove Springsteen to go to court in London in 1998 to prevent Masquerade Music from releasing a collection of his old demos and outtakes – "I'm not losing sleep at night over it, but I'm protective of it where I can be," as he puts it – and it also informs his attitude to seeing his work traded for free across the Internet.

"My take on that as a musician is I know what it takes to write a song, and it's hard and you don't write that many and you pour your blood and sweat into it. I do think it's theft, y'know, I do feel like that about it. Where it's going I don't know. The music business is in a big state of transition at the moment. I don't know anyone who does know where it's going to go. Wherever it goes, I'll be working somewhere."

Perhaps some of his inclination to look back and take stock has been prompted by the death of his father, Doug, in 1998. In between stints as a factory worker, prison guard and bus driver, Springsteen Sr frequently found himself out of work. Bitterness and disillusion caused him to clash frequently with the bohemian-inclined Bruce during his adolescence, and Doug's Irish-Dutch background was probably the worst combination when it came to defusing overheated emotions. Their fractious relationship was charted in several songs, notably "Independence Day", "My Father's House" and "Adam Raised A Cain". There was a period during which Bruce would often talk about his father during his long onstage raps.

Passing time had improved father-son relations considerably, to the point where they were rubbing along pretty well by the end. "I probably went through a few changes when he died," Springsteen ponders. "It's a big moment. It's like 'OK, you're the daddy now'. When your father's gone, I think your own adultness and your sense of responsibility and the role you play in your family at large increases. But he had a pretty peaceful passing and we knew it was coming for a good while, so I had time to go and spend some time and just sit. Big thing, of course, for my mother. They were married for 50-some years. It changes the way you see yourself."

Does he see Doug in himself now? "Oh yeah, all the time," he says slowly. "All the time. It's funny, as I've gotten older, I've started to look more like him. I used to look more like my mom, but if I … I'm a little down in weight now, but if I go up another 10 or 15 pounds he'll be looking right back at me in the mirror. I go 'There you are!', y'know? Your features change. When I was young I looked Irish, when I was a little kid I had the little Irish features, as my children have had, up until around 12 or 13 and then zoom! Your face lengthens out and you see the Italian features. I had that for most of my life, it's kinda how I got used to looking at myself. Then as you get a little older, for some reason I see a little bit of the Irish creeping back in. Your face gets a little rounder, your forehead gets a little higher and occasionally I'll look in the mirror and he'll just be looking back at me."

Generations keep changing inexorably, and Springsteen can feel gravity's pull. "Of course, there's the behaviour you inherit from your parents. Over the years I've done a lot to sort through a lot of that. Obviously all your initial responses to things, you respond the way they responded, y'know? Some of those are okay, and some you want to leave behind. My attitude was the way we honour our parents is we hold on to the good things that they taught us and we lose the things that were their mistakes. That's the way we honour them after they're gone, and when we become parents ourselves. That's your life job. That's what people are supposed to be out there doing in some fashion."

Apart from making albums and touring, of course. "I'm coming up on being a 53-year-old guy, and the music business tends to be a little hostile at this time," he says, with a chuckle. "That's OK, 'cos my take is I believe this is one of my very best records. I feel down in my soul that it's as good as any record I've made with the band. I feel like I did my job, and I don't know the way that radio responds, and I'm not comfortable with a lot of the ways that music is disseminated at the moment. I've got a working band, we're gonna go out and we're gonna work very hard playing this record every night. I'll do my best to help it find a home and a place in the world, and then let the chips fall where they may. So!"

BOSSFACTS

Astronauts on a 1999 voyage of space shuttle Discovery were played "Rendezvous" as a wake-up call, before docking with the Hubble telescope. The Boss had a planet named after him that same year: Kiwi astronomer IP Griffin christened Asteroid 23990 "Springsteen"

THE GANG'S ALL HERE How Bruce rounded up the guys for one last job...

SEVERAL MEMBERS OF the E Street Band had difficulty in coming to terms with their decade-long professional separation from Springsteen. Before he could reconvene the unit for their revival tour in 1999, the leader had some ruffled feathers and feelings of betrayal to overcome. "There would have to be," Springsteen admits. "You don't stop something that happened for 20 years or so and then everybody goes, 'Oh yeah, okay, see ya'. That's not on the cards. The good thing was we kept all the relationships up. I called everybody, told them what I was doing. When I parted from the band in 1988, I didn't have an idea for what to do with them at that time. I was going on 40, I wanted to play with some other musicians and see what that felt like. We'd been together straight for a long time. I'm sure everyone does things that get on the other guys' nerves, and it felt like a good time for a break.

Springsteen and E Street members live at the Thomas & Mack Center, Las Vegas, August 18, 2002

"People went out and found their own lives and they've all done a lot of different things. Some guys took it harder than others. Some guys were angry, some went off and had things they had to do. It was the normal feelings you'd expect, but it's a strong group of people. It was a band that was structured very well from the start, to avoid some of the kinds of conflicts that occur in other groups. I'd got signed to Columbia as a solo artist, I put the band together, everybody knew what their jobs were, I knew what my job was. I think over the years that clarity removed some of the friction you see in other groups.

Signing as a solo artist was important to me. I'd been in a few bands and I could feel it just wasn't gonna work for me. I needed to be able to call the shots, and I needed musicians who were very dedicated to me and to the music we were gonna make together. I was lucky in that I was surrounded by people I'd known and some who I'd grown up with. The presence of the band was very comforting, particularly in the early years. Also they looked to me to be responsible and guide us through what we were going through, so that was a responsibility, not just to myself, but to the people I cared about.

"The best thing was, on the last tour, I thought the guys played better than ever before. I thought Max Weinberg had gotten better on drums and it was great to have the full band with Nils Lofgren and Steve Van Zandt. People were just happy to be there. Then, on top of that, one of the things I was proudest of was all my guys are living, they're healthy and alive, and if you look around there's not many other bands that have been around as long as we have where that's the case.

So it was a good organisation over the years that gave me a tremendous amount of support, and I think provided structure and support for everyone. It really worked as a unit."

REX FEATURES

DEVILS & DUST

Dubya returns to the White House, and Springsteen files an unflinching study of a nation on its knees. BY TERRY STAUNTON

26 APRIL 2005

IF *THE RISING* WAS Bruce Springsteen's articulate musical response to 9/11, his next album was, in some ways, a more emotional reaction to events affecting his homeland. Springsteen had campaigned for Democrat John Kerry in the run-up to the 2004 US election on the Vote For Change tour ("No Surrender" was one of a handful of unofficial Kerry campaign songs), and now, in the wake of George W Bush's victory, he admitted to feeling disillusioned.

The 12 songs on *Devils & Dust* were not, however, entirely written in the wake of Kerry's defeat, nor did they all address specific political concerns. Several dated from 10 years earlier, when Springsteen was touring his last low-key confessional album, *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*. Another, "All The Way Home", was recorded by Southside Johnny as far back as 1991. And although the overwhelming viewpoint was clearly Springsteen's, the album found him assuming several roles – soldiers, immigrants, boxers, even Jesus – in perhaps his most character-driven release since *Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ*.

"The people I find the most interesting are people who have something eating at them and they're not exactly sure what that thing is," Springsteen said at the time of the album's release. "The characters on this record are all trying to find their way through those questions. These are all songs about people whose souls are in danger, or at risk, through where they are in the world and what the world is bringing to them. That's a human constant, and whether people are religious or spiritual or not, that risk is something they instinctively feel on a daily basis."

It was easy to see the resulting album as the final part of a trilogy which started with *Nebraska* and continued with

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1. Devils & Dust ★★★★★
2. All The Way Home ★★★
3. Reno ★★★★
4. Long Time Comin' ★★★★
5. Black Cowboys ★★★★
6. Maria's Bed ★★★
7. Silver Palomino ★★★★
8. Jesus Was An Only Son ★★★★★
9. Leah ★★★★
10. The Hitter ★★★★★
11. All I'm Thinkin' About ★★★
12. Matamoros Banks ★★★★★

Released: April 26, 2005
Produced by: Brendan O'Brien, Bruce Springsteen and Chuck Plotkin
Recorded at: Thrill Hill (LA and New Jersey) and Southern Tracks (Atlanta)
Personnel: Springsteen (vocals, guitar, keys, percussion); Brendan O'Brien (bass, tambora, sitar, electric sarangi, hurdy gurdy); Chuck Plotkin (piano); Marty Rifkin (steel guitar); Steve Jordan (drums); Danny Federici (keys); Soozie Tyrell (violin, bk vocals); Patti Scalfia and Lisa Lowell (bk vocals); Mark Pender (trumpet); Susan Welty, Thomas Witte, Brucie Andrus, Donald Strand (horns); Nashville String Machine (strings).
Highest chart position: US 1; UK 1

DEVILS & DUST
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

SIDE 1
1. Devils + Dust
2. All the Way Home +
3. Reno ••
SIDE 2
1. Long Time Comin' •
2. Black Cowboys
3. Maria's Bed
Produced by Brendan O'Brien
+ Produced by Brendan O'Brien, Bruce Springsteen & Chuck Plotkin
SIDE 3
1. Silver Palomino
2. Jesus Was An Only Son
3. Leah
SIDE 4
1. The Hitter
2. All I'm Thinkin' About
3. Matamoros Banks
www.brucespringsteen.net

DEVILS & DUST
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
SIDE 1
C2 93900
AL 94565
33 1/3 RPM STEREO
& DUST
SPRINGSTEEN
SIDE 3
C2 93900
AL 94566
33 1/3 RPM STEREO
All Songs by Bruce Springsteen
Produced by Brendan O'Brien

The Ghost Of Tom Joad, but *Devils & Dust* was less of a "solo" venture than its predecessors. Horns and strings, while understated, played a significant role in fleshing out the tone of the songs, and the E Street Band's Danny Federici contributed almost dirge-like keyboards to underscore Springsteen's lyrically eloquent portraits of lost souls and misfits on the fringes of society. In keeping with the shot of Springsteen on the LP cover, the music created a sepia filter, a kind of *mise en scène* to the vocal.

"Devils & Dust" itself was first heard in soundchecks when the E Street Band were touring *The Rising*, shortly after the invasion of Iraq, and producer Brendan O'Brien has been credited with persuading Springsteen to hold the song back for a more reflective and personal project. In that sense, it can be seen as the instigator for the entire LP, prompting Springsteen to delve into his back pages for like-minded material. He sings as a squaddie far from home, both geographically and philosophically, asking, *"What if the thing you do to survive kills the things you love?"* The idea of a soldier questioning the morality of warfare is a recurring motif in American popular culture, and "Devils & Dust" plays like a sombre musical version of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge Of Courage*, especially when Springsteen dreams of blood-soaked fields smelling of dead bodies.

The last time Springsteen chose to make a political allegory an album title track it notoriously backfired, with "Born In The USA" misinterpreted and hijacked as a sky-punching call to arms. But there's no such ambiguity to "Devils & Dust", save for the moral conundrums the narrator himself addresses. Stripped of the bombast with which the E Street Band might have buried the song, it slowly builds from Springsteen alone with an acoustic guitar to a final verse embellished by hymnal organ and ominous strings, suggesting conflict – or the fear of conflict – is just around the corner. It's almost filmic in its approach, typical of the use of instrumentation throughout the album, as Springsteen explained at the time: "I try to find small shifts in musical tone that complement the characters I'm singing about. You're always trying to find a voice you haven't used before, to make each new character come alive. You're still writing from the essential core of who you are, but if you're doing it correctly your own voice is supposed to disappear into the voice of the person you're singing about."

The title track's allusions to religion (*"Find the love that God wills and the faith that He commands"*) hark back to Springsteen's own lapsed Catholicism, and there are more pointed questions asked on "Jesus Was An Only Son". What if Jesus had lived and raised a family, as his mother Mary might have wanted him to? The mother and child relationship at the heart of the song was, in some ways, parallel to how Bruce sang to his own father on "Independence Day" from *The River*, the offspring risking the parent's disappointment by following his own destiny.

Mother-son relationships loom large again on "The Hitter", Springsteen casting himself as a boxer returning home, punchdrunk and agonised that the path he has been compelled to follow revolves around violence for entertainment. In a markedly Dylanesque mumble, Bruce recounts the lost teeth and broken jaws of his profession, going as far as to namecheck a real-life fighter, 1920s world welterweight champion Jack Thompson. One fixed fight too many and the prodigal son seeks refuge in the bosom of his family, only to leave again and try his luck on the illegal bare-knuckle circuit: *"Understand, in the end, Ma, every man plays the game/If you know of one different, then speak out his name."* He may have referenced a character from *The Grapes Of Wrath* in the title song of *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, but "The Hitter" is the closest Springsteen has come to condensing the richness of an entire Steinbeck novel into four minutes of music.

The search for a better life somewhere else has always informed Springsteen's music (it's no accident that the phrase *"the promised land"* has turned up in nine of his songs over the years), but rarely as evocatively as on "Matamoros Banks". A stretch of the Rio Grande renowned for Mexicans illegally entering the US at Brownsville, Texas, its currents have claimed hundreds of victims. In what could be a companion piece to "Sinaloa Cowboys" from *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, Springsteen tells the story of one casualty in reverse, beginning with the discovery of a body (*"For two days the river keeps you down/Then you rise to the light without a sound"*) before working backwards to the man serenading the true love who made an earlier, successful crossing. It's a tender eulogy, Bruce gently picking an acoustic guitar, his vocal close to a whisper.

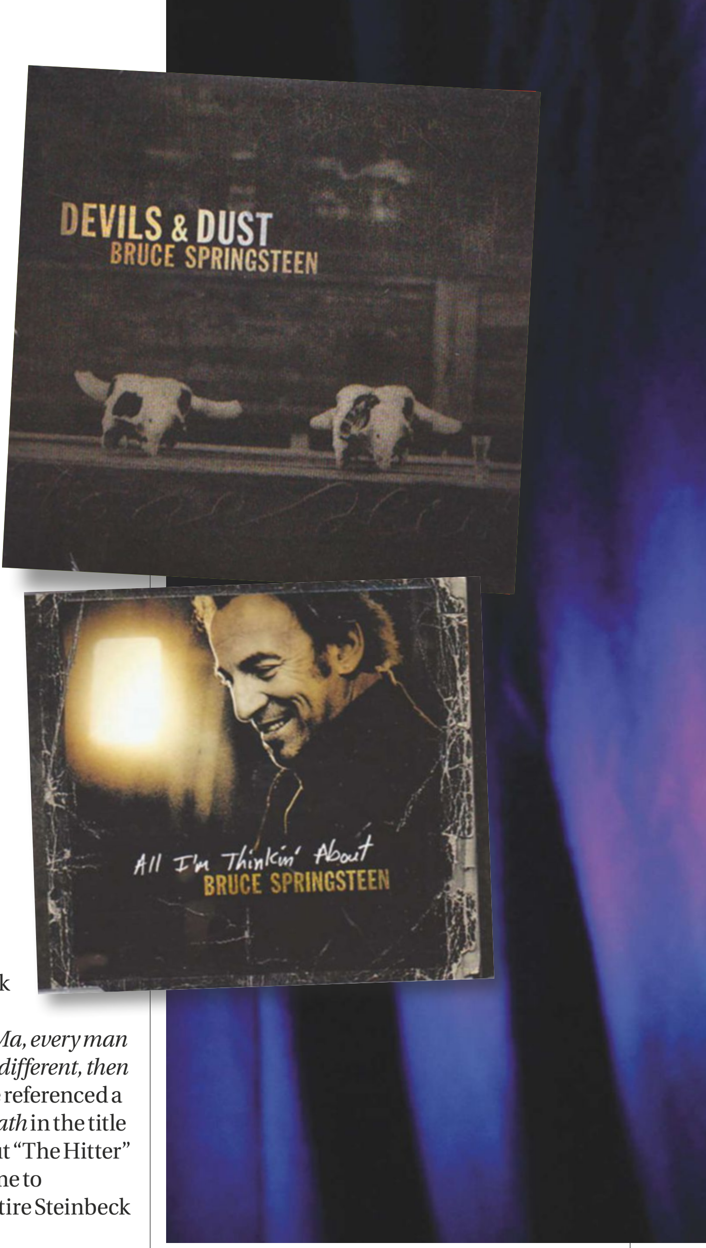
Any fears that "Jesus Was An Only Son" might incur the wrath of religious watchdogs came to naught; it was another track that landed *Devils & Dust* the first parental advisory sticker of Springsteen's career. On first listen, "Reno" drifted along like a Tex-Mex lullaby, dobro and slide guitar to the fore, with the protagonist embarking on a furtive sexual liaison. However, when the lyric headed for the area of sodomy with a prostitute (*"200 dollars straight in, 250 up the ass"*), it was too much for Starbucks, who dropped out of a deal to stock the album in its chain of coffee houses. There's nothing lewd or lascivious about "Reno", though, not a hint of cock-rock swagger. Ultimately, the sex is unsatisfactory and the "John" is as lost and as lonely as before, still searching for something indefinable to make his world a better place.

Amid all the hopelessness and fatalism there are few suggestions of better times ahead. Even "All The Way Home", the track first given to Southside Johnny, hedges its bets when looking for a happy ending. *"You've got no reason to trust me/My confidence is a little rusty,"* sings Springsteen to the object of his affections, admitting that he's been a failure up to this point and may not have much to offer. There are echoes of the street corner poetry of *The River* in both "Maria's Bed" and "Leah", the former finding Springsteen enduring dead-end work for the promise of salvation when he

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ **"*Devils & Dust* sees him reaffirm his worth, as Bruce swaps the political back to the personal and fact for fiction with an album of fabricated folk (lore) tales."** CAT GOODWIN, NME, APRIL 30, 2005

★ **"Having evolved from raucous rocker to American icon, Bruce Springsteen is now developing a separate persona as a musical short-story writer. The tone is sombre, drenched in memories and regrets."** ADAM SWEETING, UNCUT, JUNE 2005



Have harmonica, will travel: Stockholm, Sweden, June 25, 2005

> ***Devils & Dust* is striking for its lack of rage, and never screams its messages. It's difficult to escape the album's atmosphere of resignation...**

gets home and the latter dreaming of the same utopia he set out for with Mary in "Thunder Road". On the surface, all three songs seem slight, especially when held up against the album's more densely plotted selections, but they largely stay true to the themes of the whole. Springsteen is on a journey towards redemption, towards some kind of healing, albeit constantly undermined and just out of reach. Even if he gets the girl as the end credits roll, there's a sense that more trouble is waiting for him in the sequel.

What is particularly striking about *Devils & Dust*, something that doesn't fully reveal itself until after a few listens, is its lack of rage. That's partly due to the absence of a powerhouse like the E Street Band, the songs tending to be cushioned by shuffles and whispers from carefully chosen intruments. But for all the desperation its characters experience the album never screams its messages. The angry Springsteen of "American Skin (41 Shots)", written three years earlier, is nowhere to be seen, the nearest facsimile being the determined expectant father of "Long Time Comin'", who vows to *"bury my old soul and dance on its grave"*.

Bush's 2004 victory may have been the trigger for *Devils & Dust,* but it's worth repeating that the LP is not a party political broadcast, an exercise in Republican-bashing from a superstar smarting over the failure of the Vote For Change lobby. Many of its songs were written when Democrat Bill Clinton was in the White House, and Springsteen's most visible activism has always been of a more humanitarian than political bent.

The America he surveyed in 2005 was not a pretty one; a vulnerable country where many of the inhabitants were disenfranchised. The stoic, uplifting songs of *The Rising* had found Springsteen in optimistic voice, as did 2009's post-Obama victory set, *Working On A Dream*, but sandwiched in between was a more troubled Bruce. It's difficult to escape the album's atmosphere of resignation, its place in his canon as a requiem for a country, the "hard" land that inspired so much of his previous work.

It seems unlikely that Springsteen will revisit many of the album's tracks in future live shows, having gone on record as describing its contents of being locked in time, a snapshot of an America not at a crossroads but in a bitter cul-de-sac. That would be a pity, as *Devils & Dust* is arguably his most fully realised record of social commentary, an unflinching study of a nation on its knees, not knowing where, when or in what form salvation will come. ✪

BOSSFACTS

★ **Springsteen earned five Grammy nominations for the album, winning Best Rock Vocal Performance for the title track**

★ **"Silver Palomino" was written in tribute to a friend of Bruce's, Fiona Chappel, who died leaving two young sons**

CAMERAPRESS

WE SHALL OVERCOME: THE SEEGER SESSIONS

"There's diamonds in the sidewalk, there's gutters lined in song…" One radical American patriot honours another. BY NEIL SPENCER

25 APRIL 2006

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN attributes the genesis of his only album of cover versions to his daughter, Jessica. In 1997 he had been asked to contribute to a Pete Seeger tribute album – the great American folk singer and political activist was then approaching 80 years old. Surprisingly perhaps, Springsteen had only a woolly knowledge of Seeger's music and life, something he attributed to "growing up a rock and roll kid". As he played his way through a stack of newly purchased Seeger albums, his daughter piped up, "That sounds like fun". The remark triggered something in Bruce; maybe it would be fun to play this stuff himself.

A dozen-strong troupe of folk players was duly amassed through the contacts of E Street violinist Soozie Tyrell – fiddlers, accordion, banjo, washboard, upright bass, brass – and in the living room of Springsteen's New Jersey farm house they set up and played, with the horn section in the hallway. It was Springsteen's first piece of home recording since his *Nebraska* days. "I counted off the opening chords to 'Jesse James' and away we went," Bruce later recalled in his liner notes. "It was a carnival ride, the sound of surprise, and the pure joy of playing… it was a way back to the informality and eclecticism of my earliest music."

It was certainly informal, with Springsteen sometimes shouting the chord changes to the players as they tackled songs that Seeger had revived and popularised; "John Henry", "Jacob's Ladder" et al. For a collective that had never played together, they made a pretty good racket, a sound that was part country (with banjo prominent) and part American Irish bar band (lots of accordion) – the bastard child of The Band and The Pogues, perhaps. Whatever it was, the resultant noise was unmistakeably Bruce.

For all the fun had that first day in 1997, it was eight years before Springsteen reconvened the players to complete what had become 'the Seeger sessions'. Various events had intervened; the lengthy assemblage of *Tracks*, the reunion tour with the E Street Band, writing, recording and touring *The Rising* and *Devils & Dust*. Over two more days of home recording, one in 2005, one in 2006, Springsteen and his group

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Old Dan Tucker ★★★
2 Jesse James ★★★
3 Mrs McGrath ★★★★
4 O Mary Don't You Weep ★★★
5 John Henry ★★★
6 Erie Canal ★★★
7 Jacob's Ladder ★★
8 My Oklahoma Home ★★★★
9 Eyes On The Prize ★★★
10 Shenadoah ★★★★
11 Pay Me My Money Down ★★★
12 We Shall Overcome ★★★
13 Froggie Went A Courtin' ★★
14 Buffalo Gals ★★★
15 How Can I Keep From Singing ★★★
16 How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times And Live ★★★★
17 Bring 'Em Home ★★★★
18 American Land ★★★★

Released: April 25, 2006.
American Land 18-track edition released: October 3, 2006
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau
Recorded at: home in New Jersey
Additional personnel: Frank Bruno (guitar); Jeremy Chatzky (bass); Larry Eagle (drums); Charles Giordarno (accordion, keys); Sam Barfeld (violin); Soozie Tyrell (violin); Mark Clifford (banjo); Ed Manion (sax); Richie Rosenberg (trombone); Mark Pender (trumpet); Patti Scialfa (vocals); Lisa Lowell (vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 3; US 3

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
WE SHALL
OVERCOME
THE
SEEGER SESSIONS

SIDE 1
Old Dan Tucker Jesse James Mrs. McGrath
O Mary Don't You Weep
SIDE 2
John Henry Erie Canal Jacob's Ladder
SIDE 3
My Oklahoma Home Eyes On The Prize Shenandoah
SIDE 4
Pay Me My Money Down We Shall Overcome
Froggie Went A Courtin'

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
WE SHALL
OVERCOME
PRODUCED BY BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
SIDE 1
82876 83439 1
AL99057
33 1/3 RPM STEREO
OLD DAN TUCKER
-PUBLIC DOMAIN-ARR. BY B. SPRINGSTEEN
JESSE JAMES
-TRAD.-ARRANGEMENT BY B. SPRINGSTEEN
MRS. MCGRATH
-TRAD.-ARR. AND MUSIC ADAPTED BY B. SPRINGSTEEN
O MARY DON'T YOU WEEP
-TRAD.-ARR. AND MUSIC ADAPTED BY B. SPRINGSTEEN
THE
SEEGER SESSIONS

The Seeger Sessions band, including Soozie Tyrell (back row centre), Charles Giordiano (standing, with accordion) and banjoist Mark Clifford (front left)

finished the album. The documentary film on the later 'American Land' editions of the album show Springsteen in animated mood as producer, arranger and bandleader, enthusing about the "raw" folk tradition and the virtues of music being "made not played". Springsteen's exuberance is part of the appeal of *We Shall Overcome*, along with some inspired brass parts from the Miami Horns, with their punchy soul riffs and evocations of New Orleans jazz.

It is hard to know exactly why Springsteen chose to jump from *Devils & Dust* to the completion of the Seeger sessions; perhaps he wanted something light-hearted, a step sideways from the earnestness of his last two albums, and a way out of the acoustic/E Street dichotomy. Or perhaps he saw a chance to pass comment on his country's political course without making what would be shouted down as 'a protest record'. The vitriolic backlash that had greeted The Dixie Chicks' criticism of President Bush and the invasion of Iraq in 2003 – everything from airwave bans to death threats – had deterred all but the bravest from making 'unpatriotic' music (take a bow, Merle Haggard).

It would be hard to smear the 15 antique numbers on *We Shall Overcome* as unpatriotic. Seeger himself might be a civil rights champion, eco-warrior and political troublemaker , but the roster of tunes assembled under his banner was a largely innocuous mixture of blues, spirituals, folk and country. Some songs – "Shenandoah", "The Eerie Canal" – were synonymous with the building of the American nation. Others were kids' favourites. Could "Froggie Went A Courtin'" be reckoned an act of subversion against the Neo-Con Empire? Hardly.

The only track on *We Shall Overcome* that could be construed as a direct comment on the Bush regime's wars was "Mrs McGrath", where a mother welcomes home a son from the navy, his legs blown away by a cannonball, an injury all too familiar from mines and roadside bombs in the Middle East conflicts. The song's conclusion comes with a bite: *"All foreign wars I do proclaim/Live on blood and mother's pain/I'd rather have my son as he used to be/Than the King of America and his whole navy."*

A powerful combination of personal and political, "Mrs McGrath" (or "My Son John" on this side of the Atlantic) was not quite alone as a protest song. Both "We Shall Overcome", which Springsteen had recorded for the Seeger tribute album, and "Keep Your Eyes On The Prize" were anthems of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, emblematic of a chapter of American history that was in danger of being forgotten.

The rest of the album comprised a jumbled

BOSSFACTS

★ *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* won a 2007 Grammy for 'Best Traditional Folk Album'
★ Many of the musicians on the album belong to The Gotham Playboys, a group who played at two of Springsteen's birthday parties

repertoire. "Jacob's Ladder" and "O Mary Don't You Weep" were 19th century spirituals, "Pay Me My Money Down" had started life as a sea shanty, while "My Oklahoma Home" was a modern folk song from 1961. "Jesse James", which turned a notorious bank robber into a Robin Hood figure, was penned in the Wild West of the 1880s. "How Can I Keep From Singing" was a Victorian hymn. "John Henry" and "Old Dan Tucker" had origins in the work songs and ballads of the United States' westward expansion.

Whatever their origin, the songs all had an association with Pete Seeger, being popularised by him either when he sang with The Weavers, or in his solo capacity. Thanks to Seeger and fellow travellers like Guy Carawan, these songs had become staples of the folk movement of the 1950s and 1960s. They were crowdpleasers in Boston's Irish bars, reverently sung standards at university hootenannies, and in the Greenwich Village cafes where a young Joan Baez and Bob Dylan were making their names.

Seeger, born in 1919, came from a generation further back – he was a contemporary of Woody Guthrie, though Seeger came from the opposite side of the tracks to Woody. Born into a middle-class, musical family, Seeger had become a political firebrand in his twenties, joining the Communist party and espousing egalitarian values from the stage and on the radio broadcasts of Alan Lomax, the great collector of American folk song.

Lomax, Seeger and others in the folk movement dreamed of 'a people's music'; songs born in social struggle that articulated the experiences, hopes and rights of the common man and woman. In Britain, folk pioneers like Ewan MacColl (who wrote "Dirty Old Town") shared the same dream and leftist politics. For them 'folk' music was 'authentic' in a way that the commercial ditties of Tin Pan Alley could never be. What, in fact, was the 'music industry' if not another example of capitalism's desire to rip off and mislead ordinary people with its sugar-spun fantasies? Needless to say, folk's upholders of proletarian virtue loathed rock'n'roll, the music that so entranced real-life working class kids like Bruce Springsteen. Notoriously, Seeger had tried to pull the plug on a newly electrified Dylan at the 1965 Newport Folk festival.

Such were the cultural battle lines in 1950s and early 1960s America. The stakes could be high. In 1955 Seeger was summoned before the House Un-American Activities Committee led by Senator Eugene McCarthy, where his refusal to testify led him to being indicted for Contempt Of Congress. As a result his concerts were outlawed and his radio presence stifled, though Seeger succesfully contested a 10-year prison sentence.

Parallels between the paranoia and suppression of the McCarthy era and the censorious atmosphere of the Bush regime were obvious. Bruce Springsteen's championing of Seeger's songbook thus carried more resonance than might at first appear. It was one American patriot honouring another. Both offered a definition of 'loving one's country' that was radically different to the establishment's. It was what Springsteen had tried to put across on "Born In The USA", only to see his sentiments hijacked.

This time round, Bruce chose his turf with care. As much was evident in his choice of numbers on *The Seeger Sessions*. He could, for example, have revisited one of Seeger's own compositions: "Waist Deep In The Big Muddy" was Seeger's clever commentary on the impasse of the Vietnam war that Springsteen had adapted for *Lucky Town*'s "Big Muddy". It would have made perfect sense in the light of the Iraq conflict, and some commentators suspected Springsteen of ducking a fight.

Yet once Springsteen took the album on the road – which he did with remarkable thoroughness, touring on both sides of the Atlantic – his appetite for political confrontation grew markedly. He began to include "Bring 'Em Home" on the playlist, a number Seeger had written calling for the end of the Vietnam war, and whose lyrics Springsteen updated brilliantly: *"They want to test their grand theories/With the blood of you and me/Bring 'em home!"*

Offstage, Bruce was also up for a scrap. In a telling interview with CNN, he was accused of getting too politically outspoken – look at what happened to the Dixie Chicks. "Saying musicians shouldn't speak up is insane, it's funny," responded Springsteen in a gale of laughter. But was it right for a singer to say we should get rid of President Bush, pressed the CNN link. "That's just common sense… I don't even see that as politics," he shot back.

A pretty good racket, part country, part American Irish bar band – the bastard son of The Band and The Pogues…

THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ "There's been nothing like this in Springsteen's career. One minute you hear a violin and guitar duelling like it was The Hot Club Of Paris in the 1920s. The next ("O Mary Don't You Weep", f'rinstance) the Crescent City funeral march is in full effect."
GAVIN MARTIN, UNCUT, APRIL 2006

★ "This is a folk-gospel tribute album with harmony and backing vocals so powerful you'd think it was the population of New Jersey marching in Technicolor over the grey, polluted Hudson." CAT GOODWIN, NME, APRIL 22, 2006

Springsteen had also been emboldened – and outraged – by Bush's careless response to the devastation visited on New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. Onstage he deplored the "political cronyism" involved and updated another old folk favourite, "How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times And Live" (written by Blind Alfred Reed in 1929): *"He looked and gave a little pep talk/Said 'I'm with you' then took a walk."*

Live, the dozen-strong group that had cut *The Seeger Sessions* had swollen by a further six members into a behemoth which Springsteen conducted with rock'n'roll panache – it was all a long way from the polite, puritan, non-electric performances of Seeger's heyday, yet it was a continuation of his spirit. "American Land", the number that lent its name to the expanded version of the album, was likewise an extension of a 1947 song Seeger had collected (it was written by a Slovakian immigrant), but which Springsteen expanded with several verses of his own. It remains one of Springsteen's most complete tributes to his homeland, alternating the fantasies that America's *"teeming millions"* might have entertained before they arrived – *"All the women wear silk and satin to their knees"* – with the realities – *"We made the steel that built the cities with the sweat of our two hands."*

The story of the folk singer once threatened with jail by the Senate and the rock'n'roller who was inspired by him, was to reach a remarkable finale when Seeger and Springsteen played President Obama's inauguration together, singing "This Land Is Your Land", Woody Guthrie's visionary anthem. Springsteen gave a moving speech at the event, paying tribute to Seeger as "a living archive of America's music and conscience" and observing that behind the singer's "benign, grandfatherly appearance he is a creature of a stubborn, defiant and nasty optimism."

Later in 2009 Springsteen was to get a similarly warm tribute from President Barack Obama, when he was presented with a Kennedy Center Honour at the White House. Obama called Bruce "the rock and roll laureate" and quipped, "I'm the President, but he's The Boss". ✪

MAGIC

In which '60s hooks meet 21st-century anxieties, and Springsteen has "a little romance with my oldest stuff". BY BUD SCOPPA

★ 1 OCTOBER 2007

ON THE COVER of *Magic*, the glowering sepia portrait of Bruce Springsteen could easily be read as reflecting the artist's emotional state in the first decade of the 21st Century. But on the second of his three Noughties LPs with the E Street Band, he brought some striking colour to his re-engagement with the world. *Magic* found Springsteen ready not only to celebrate the delirious pop records that had shaped him, but also to reconsider his own rich body of work.

Five years after *The Rising*, Springsteen decided it was time to return to the studio with the E Street Band and producer Brendan O'Brien for another Big Statement. Throughout the LP, it was dramatically apparent that the bandmembers had been chomping at the bit to get back to business, to grapple with a ton of ideas their boss had given them to work with.

On the occasion of the album's release in October 2007, Springsteen gave an illuminating interview to Joe Levy in *Rolling Stone*. "I would say on this record I got re-infatuated with pop music," he revealed. "I'm a pop kid. I grew up on Top 40. On this record… there's some classic '60s pop forms. California-rock influences – *Pet Sounds* and a lot of Byrds. I wanted to take the productions that create the perfect pop universes and then subvert them with the lyrics – fill them with the hollowness and the fear, the uneasiness of these very uneasy times." He also acknowledged that, "Lately, I've had a little romance with my oldest stuff." Interestingly, Springsteen never mentions the villain of the piece by name. "I didn't want a big Bush-bashing record," he explained. "I've found ways to express my political concerns and personal concerns, and I always found them best combined, because that's how people live." In those three remarks, Bruce pretty much covered what's going on in this record.

In terms of its subject matter, *Magic* could have been titled 'Life During Wartime' or 'Love In The Time Of Cholera', though CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Radio Nowhere ★★★★★
2 You'll Be Comin' Down ★★★★
3 Livin' In The Future ★★★★
4 Your Own Worst Enemy ★★★★★
5 Gypsy Biker ★★★★★
6 Girls In Their Summer Clothes ★★★★★
7 I'll Work For Your Love ★★★
8 Magic ★★★★
9 Last To Die ★★★★
10 Long Walk Home ★★★★★
11 Devil's Arcade ★★★★
12 Terry's Song ★★★★

Released: October 1, 2007
Produced by: Brendan O'Brien
Recorded in: Atlanta; additional recording in Hollywood, New Jersey
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen, Roy Bittan (keyboards); Clarence Clemons (saxophone, percussion); Danny Federici (keyboards); Nils Lofgren (guitars); Patti Scialfa (vocals, guitar); Garry Tallent (bass); Steven Van Zandt (guitars); Max Weinberg (drums)
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 1

BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN
MAGIC

SIDE A
RADIO NOWHERE
YOU'LL BE COMIN' DOWN
LIVIN' IN THE FUTURE
YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY
GYPSY BIKER
GIRLS IN THEIR SUMMER CLOTHES
SIDE B
I'LL WORK FOR YOUR LOVE
MAGIC
LAST TO DIE
LONG WALK HOME
DEVIL'S ARCADE
Produced by Brendan O'Brien
BRUCESPRINGSTEEN.NET
SONY BMG

SIDE A
BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN
MAGIC
Radio Nowhere
You'll Be Comin' Down
Livin' In The Future
Your Own Worst Enemy
Gypsy Biker
Girls In Their Summer Clothes
All songs written by Bruce Springsteen / © 2007 Bruce Springsteen (ASCAP) /
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88697170601 33 1/3 RPM STEREO
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"Columbia" and Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off. Marca Registrada.
BIEM/GEMA. Made in the EU. LC 00162.
SONY BMG
MUSIC ENTERTAINMENT

its lyrics unspool in the formally eloquent American vernacular of Cormac McCarthy. Musically, though, these songs consciously recall the '60s, an era during which young artists reacted to the commotion of the world around them with gleaming works of architectural beauty. In general, Springsteen was juxtaposing the anxiety of living in the first decade of the 21st Century with the joys of creamy pop hooks.

The first three tracks systematically laid out the album's three focal points. The rousing but dark opener "Radio Nowhere" appropriated the galloping beat of surf music much as Love did on "7 And 7 Is", but recast the arching repeated chord progression on which so many surf songs were based into a minor key, inverting its joie de vivre to introduce the record's pressing thematic concerns. The refrain – *"I just want to hear some rhythm"* – worked on two levels, referring to the dearth of good ol' rock'n'roll on the hip hop-dominated airwaves, but, more importantly, posing rhythm as the imposition of order on chaos. And that is precisely what the band, pent up with anticipation, delivers in a sustained burst of adrenaline behind their leader's incantations. "It's an end-of-the-world scenario – he's seeing the apocalypse," Springsteen explained to Levy.

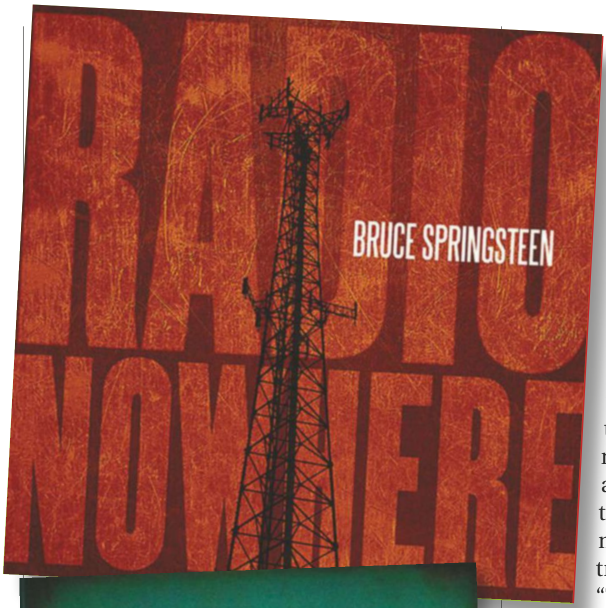
Track two was "You'll Be Comin' Down", a fond embrace of Bruce's pop roots, the band spinning out a slowed-down variation of The Searchers' circular 12-string riff in their cover of Jackie DeShannon's "Needles And Pins". It gave way to "Livin' In The Future", which started with Clarence Clemons dusting off his indelible sax riff from "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out" in an overt acknowledgement of the album's third vector – recontextualising Bruce and his posse's signature moves for a new decade, and for a loyal audience yearning for reassurance in dealing with a world gone nuts. The initial reference to actual events comes early in the song, when the narrator recalls the first Tuesday in November 2004: *"Woke up on Election Day, skies gunpowder and shades of grey/Beneath a dirty sun, I whistled my time away"*. Only later does it dawn on the whistler that something's gone terribly wrong with his country: *"My faith's been torn asunder, tell me is that rollin' thunder/Or just the sinking sound of something righteous going under?"*

But starting with the fourth track, "Your Own Worst Enemy", the record rises to another level, beginning a sustained sequence the equivalent of what baseball announcers call "the meat of the lineup" – three straight muscular, fluent and gripping instant classics. Roy Orbison lives and Phil Spector's dignity is restored in these pocket symphonies. The strings swell, Bruce lifts his voice to the heavens and the track attains a sheer grandeur rarely heard since Radiohead went for just that with *The Bends*. It ends with the pealing of bells in an unapologetic nod to its author's intentions.

The following "Gypsy Biker" brings the swelling peaks of pop's golden age to a modern-day narrative that follows a group of guys as they prepare for the return of one of their buddies from Iraq – his lifeless body wrapped in a US flag. *"We pulled your cycle out of the garage/And polished up the chrome,"* the song's devastated narrator explains. Having ridden

BOSSFACTS

★ *Magic* contains the hidden track "Terry's Song", a close-mic'd acoustic tribute to Bruce's longtime right-hand man Terry Magovern, who died in his sleep on July 30, 2007. It was recorded quickly and added to the album at the last minute, after some CDs had been pressed



two big waves provided by the E Streeters, Bruce then tops it off with the billowing brilliance of "Girls In Their Summer Clothes". He described it, with obvious satisfaction, as "a crooning '60s ballad. I don't think I've written as romantically as I allowed myself to do on that song maybe since *Born To Run*."

In his review for *Uncut*, Andrew Mueller described the song as, "The best midlife crisis anthem since Don Henley's 'Boys Of Summer'. As such, the song perfectly encapsulates *Magic*'s rather oddly mixed tone. It trades in giddying, irresistible, full-steam-ahead-and-damn-the-torpedoes rock'n'roll. But at its heart, it's essentially a thoughtful wander in search of personal and national innocence." As the track crests in an ecstatic peak, words are no longer enough, and it rides into the sunset behind full-throated, communal *"La-la-la-la"* harmonies (just as "Gypsy Biker" does) and Rickenbackers chiming like the bells of Rhymney.

Then comes a breather, as Springsteen returns to a familiar part of his oeuvre. "I'll Work For Your Love", which opens with pianist Roy Bittan quoting from "Jungleland", is a litany of Catholic iconography, matching it up with the St Christopher's medal hanging from Bruce's neck in the torso shot on the CD booklet front cover. It resolves into a charged but elliptical scene in which, *"The late afternoon sun fills the room/with the mist of the garden before the fall/I watch your hands smooth the front of your blouse and seven drops of blood fall."*

"The song 'Magic' is about living in a time when anything that is true can be made to seem like a lie, and anything that is a lie can be made to seem true," he told Levy. "That song, it's all about illusion: *'Trust none of what you hear/And less of what you'll see/This is what will be'* – we make it. Until you get to the last verse: *'There's a fire down below/It's coming up here… There's bodies hanging in the trees/This is what will be'*. That's the heart of my record right there." These are the words of an outraged observer who has transmuted his righteous indignation into poetry, just as Dylan did in the 1960s.

That sets up the album's most concretely political song, "Last To Die", which turns on a paraphrase of a statement uttered in 1971 by disaffected returning Vietnam vet John Kerry, 33 years before he lost the 2004 election: "Who'll be the last to die for a mistake?" It's followed by "Long Walk Home", which returns us to the setting of *Born In The USA*'s "My Hometown" for a poignant reminder of what matters most in this life, as Bruce sings, *"Here everybody has a neighbour/Everybody has a friend/everybody has a reason to begin again"*. What follows is the moral of this tale, binding all of its elements together in one heart-tugging statement, as a dad has one last heart-to-heart with his kid, who's about to be shipped overseas, the emotional power of the scene palpable in Springsteen's vocal and doubled by the uplift of the band. The culminating slow-build, minor-key ballad "Devils Arcade" transports us to ground level in Iraq, where a GI considers the harrowing situation in which he finds himself.

As a work of subjective social commentary, *Magic* is powerful – a life-affirming rallying cry from a compassionate dude who genuinely feels he's speaking on behalf of the disappointed, disenfranchised and frightened inhabitants of the USA. Interestingly, though, the songs that stick don't rely on context to come alive, they turn on inspired musical conception and execution. For the most part, O'Brien's dense production crams the band's pumping instrumentation into a sonic box, to fittingly claustrophobic effect. But on what Springsteen refers to as the "sparkling pop songs" – the string-embedded "Girls In Their Summer Clothes" and "Your Own Worst Enemy", as well as "Gypsy Biker" and "Long Walk Home" – the producer in effect throws open the windows, allowing the fresh air and sunlight to flood the tracking room in a shimmering display of aural majesty, capturing Bruce and the band at their most inspired.

"Radio Nowhere", "Your Own Worst Enemy", "Long Walk Home" (which Springsteen feels "could have come off *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*") and the flat-out glorious "Girls In Their Summer Clothes" would've been standouts on any Springsteen LP, *Born To Run* included. Not bad for a 58-year-old veteran.

In answer to a question from an Irish interviewer late in 2007 about what drove him to keep on keeping on, Springsteen laughingly replied, "Desperation!" After a pause, he added, more seriously, "And desire." He then recalled a moment in the middle of a concert a few days earlier when the E Street Band, "was going like 100 miles an hour and runnin' like a freight train. And someone lifted a sign in the audience that said, 'Rage against the dying light' – that's all it said… I said, 'Yeah, that's right – that's the idea'."

While so many of his mentors and contemporaries were capable of hitting one out of the park only rarely, and most were reduced to endlessly rolling out the hits from decades past, the Springsteen of *Magic* showed himself to be freshly inspired, brimming with confidence and, remarkably, once again at the top of his game. "I'm just tryin' to figure somethin' out," he told Elvis Costello this January on the latter's television show, *Spectacle*. "And if I figure it out a little bit for me, maybe I'll figure it out for you. There's always something internal pushing you forward." ✪

The Springsteen of *Magic* showed him freshly inspired, brimming with confidence, and remarkably, once again at the top of his game

THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ "*Magic* is *Born To Run* crossed with *Tunnel Of Love*, an attempt to recover the indomitable youthful fury of the former, astutely tempered by the older, wiser, sadder resignation of the latter."
ANDREW MUELLER, UNCUT, OCTOBER 2007

★ "While The Killers may have nicked his Big Sound and tales of busting out of this ole town for their second album, the return of the real Boss finds him running at 100mph in the other direction. An overwhelming sense of mortality is everywhere here. But scratch the surface and it seems like Iraq'n'roll is what keeps him awake at night."
GAVIN HAYNES, NME, OCTOBER 6, 2007

WORKING ON A DREAM

A jubilant start to the Obama era, as a revitalised and optimistic Bruce spreads the love — even in the supermarket. BY PETER WATTS

★ 27 JANUARY 2009

IN PROFOUND WAYS, Bruce Springsteen's studio output in the 2000s was defined by 9/11 and the subsequent political and emotional reaction within George W Bush's America. That changed – and how – with *Working On A Dream*, an album released at the same time as Barack Obama's inauguration. It was packed with the sort of buoyant optimism that epitomised a typical Springsteen gig, capturing what the election of Obama promised for Bruce's blue half of America.

Springsteen had never been shy of stating the gist of his political beliefs, but it was only in 2004 that this turned party-specific when he endorsed and campaigned for John Kerry. Kerry, though, never had a song written for him: *Working On A Dream*'s title track was specifically recorded for Obama, and was first performed by Springsteen at an election rally during the 2008 campaign. The act dismayed some of his fans, coming from a man who had always laboured to straddle the divide. But the behaviour and beliefs of Bush and the Republican Right meant that, in Springsteen's eyes, it was no longer possible to remain silent or neutral. And with Obama, the affection was mutual – Obama reputedly told his wife Michelle that he was only running for President because he couldn't be Bruce Springsteen. As a consequence the album, which was written and recorded in relative haste, was an almost visceral shout of jubilation at both the actuality and the potential of post-Bush America, memorialising a very specific mood at a very specific moment in US history. That was both its triumph and its failure.

Springsteen's liberated tone could be detected in the hallucinatory opening verse of the first song, "Outlaw Pete", a scintillating cowboy epic that starts as parody and ends as tragedy. *"He was born a little baby on the Appalachian Trial/At six months old he'd done three months in jail,"* sings Springsteen against a lavish clip-clopping beat. There's more than a trace of "The Ballad Of Davy

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 Outlaw Pete ★★★★★
2 My Lucky Day ★★★★
3 Working On A Dream ★★★
4 Queen Of The Supermarket ★★★
5 What Love Can Do ★★★★
6 This Life ★★
7 Good Eye ★★★★★
8 Tomorrow Never Knows ★★★
9 Life Itself ★★★
10 Kingdom Of Days ★★★★
11 Surprise, Surprise ★★★★
12 The Last Carnival ★★★★★
13 Bonus track: The Wrestler ★★★★

Released: January 27, 2009
Produced by: Brendan O'Brien
Recorded in: Atlanta, New York, Los Angeles, Portland and New Jersey
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen; Roy Bittan (piano, organ, accordion); Clarence Clemons (sax); Danny Federici (organ); Nils Lofgren (guitar); Patti Scialfa (vocals); Garry Tallent (bass); Steve Van Zandt (guitar, vocals); Max Weinberg (drums); Soozie Tyrell (violin, vocals); Patrick Warren (organ, piano, keyboards); Jason Federici (accordion)
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 1

BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN
WORKING ON A DREAM

Side One
OUTLAW PETE
MY LUCKY DAY
Side Two
WORKING ON A DREAM
QUEEN OF THE SUPERMARKET
WHAT LOVE CAN DO
Side Three
THIS LIFE
GOOD EYE
TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS
LIFE ITSELF
Side Four
KINGDOM OF DAYS
SURPRISE, SURPRISE
THE LAST CARNIVAL
Bonus Track:
THE WRESTLER
Produced by BRENDAN O'BRIEN
Side One
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
WORKING ON A DREAM

Crockett" here, the ultimate American hero who *"killed him a bear when he was only three"*, but things get more serious thereafter. The plot thickens, the pace quickens and Outlaw Pete, serenaded by a harmonica pinched from one of Morricone's spaghetti western scores, does bad, repents, settles down but is denied redemption by a relentless bounty hunter and his own guilt-ridden heart. It was an old-fashioned widescreen epic, and while Springsteen had written a few of these in recent years, the best being "The Hitter", the magnificent centrepiece of *Devils & Dust*, rarely had they been accorded such a Technicolor treatment. It was a hell of a way to start an album.

And like all the best westerns, this one had meaning. The song had a carefully directed political message. "Your past is your past," Springsteen told *The Observer* when explaining "Outlaw Pete". 'You carry it with you always. These are your sins. You carry them with you always. You better learn how to live with them, learn the story that they're telling you. Because they're whispering your future in your ear, and if you don't listen, it will be contaminated by the toxicity of your past. We've lived through a nightmare like that in the past eight years here. We had a historically blind administration who didn't take consideration of the past; thousands and thousands of people died, lives were ruined and terrible, terrible things occurred because, there was no sense of history, no sense that the past is living and the past is real."

"Outlaw Pete" said all this with no hint of sorrow. *"Can you hear me?"* is the triumphant refrain, Springsteen's taunt to Bush, which unwittingly recalled that of a Norwegian soccer commentator, who similarly goaded a divisive leader, bellowing "Maggie Thatcher, can you hear me?" after England took an unexpected beating in a crucial World Cup fixture many years go.

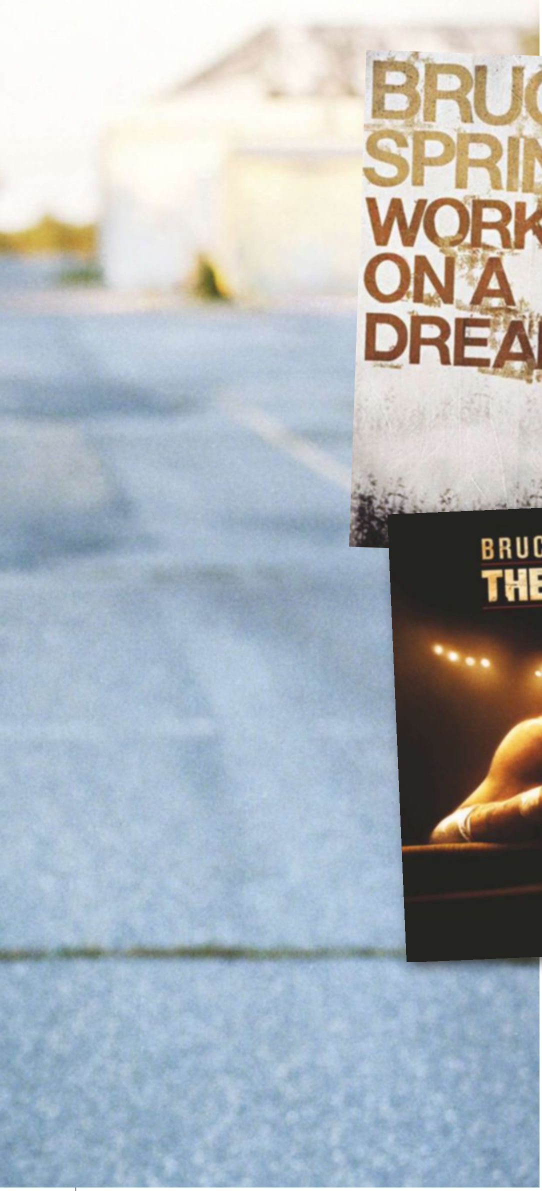
The good mood continued through "My Lucky Day", a wall-of-sound pedal-to-the-metal love song that sounds like it should be on *Born To Run*, and "Working On A Dream" itself, another love song, slower this time and augmented by jolly whistles and background *"sha-la-las"* that draw attention to the fact that Springsteen had never sounded more like Roy Orbison. *Born To Run*, another album that refracted The Byrds, Beach Boys and Phil Spector through a bar band lens, was the key reference point from Springsteen's back catalogue, and Springsteen acknowledged the parallels, but added, "You'll hear pieces of it in all my other records, but if you have all my other records, you don't have this – it takes it to some different place."

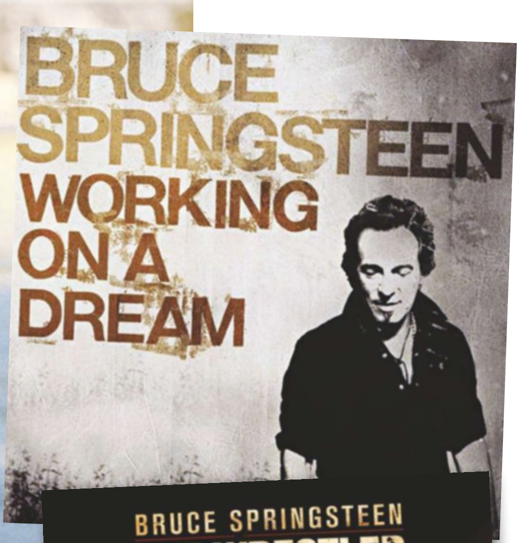
Springsteen also said that, with *Working On A Dream*, he wanted to get away from the "surface toughness" of his recent records, hence the infectious tones, polished production and lightness of touch that make …*Dream* such an easy-to-down treat. Suitably, love was a key theme – it featured prominently in nine of the 13 songs and obliquely in another three. Among them was the Biblical maelstrom of love-in-the-time-of-Bush anthem "What Love Can Do" (including a classic Springsteen reference to *"the mark of Cain"*), the more or less forgettable waltz "This Life" and pleasant mid-album fillers, "Tomorrow Never Knows", a sweet country shuffle, and "Life Itself", a standard ballad.

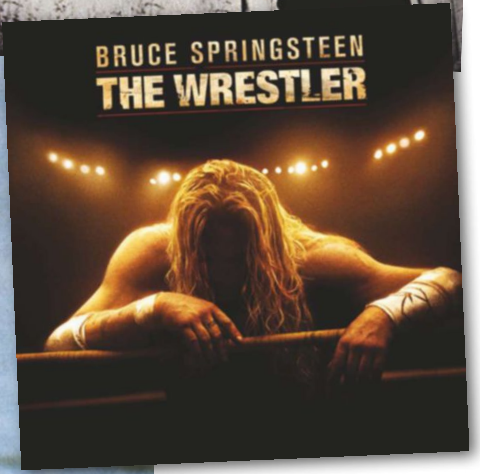
More memorable, for various reasons, was "Surprise, Surprise", a sweet, celebratory birthday song that would have been trite if it weren't so delightfully open and honest: *"Today is your birthday/We travelled so far we two/So let's blow out the candles on your cake/ And we'll raise a glass or two,"* sings Springsteen, as he impersonates Paul McCartney for three-and-a-half minutes. There was another theme

BOSSFACTS

★ The late Danny Federici's son Jason contributes accordion to "The Last Carnival"
★ Springsteen played the title track at half-time during the 2009 Super Bowl
★ "The Wrestler" won a Golden Globe for best original song







THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ **"It's hard to imagine how Bruce Springsteen could have conceived for this album a title much more emblematic of himself and what he stands for, than *Working On A Dream*. His 16th full-length studio recording is by some distance, Springsteen's weirdest, and most consistently startling to date."** ANDREW MUELLER, UNCUT, MARCH 2009

★ **"There's never been a better time to be Bruce Springsteen. This album sees him go for broke on telling tales and flashing his soul, the soul of a global phenomenon."** LEONIE COOPER, NME, JANUARY 28, 2009

on display here; that of the passing of years, and Springsteen confronted the pressing issue of ageing a number of times on the album. On "Life Itself" he asks, *"Why do the things we treasure most/Slip away in time/Till to the music we grow deaf/To God's beauty blind?"* and in the smart, lilting "Kingdom Of Days", an ode to the contentment a seasoned relationship can provide, he sings delightfully, *"I don't see the summer as it wanes/Just a subtle change of light upon your face."*

Springsteen told *Rolling Stone* that *Working On A Dream* was a "rock record about mortality and love", and while the former was in part a natural consequence of Springsteen himself having reached the age of 60, it was also due to the fact he'd recently had to confront death in his own ranks for the first time. "The Last Carnival" was explicit on this, paying touching tribute to the first member of the E-Street Band to pass away, organist Danny Federici. "It started out as a way of making sense of his passing," said Springsteen. "He was a part of that sound of the boardwalk the band grew up with and that's something that's going to be missing now." The song, a sequel to 1973's "Wild Billy's Circus Story", was a beautiful acoustic ballad in which Springsteen laments, *"We'll be riding the train without you tonight."*

That and bonus track "The Wrestler", a eulogy to a committed loser recorded for the soundtrack of the Mickey Rourke film of the same name, were the only songs that sounded, thematically, as if they might have fitted on *Magic*, despite the two albums having been written almost simultaneously.

More of a curio was "Good Eye", one of the few songs that didn't slot easily into the love or mortality silos. It was a wailing slice of swamp blues, distorted and wild, full of looped Waitsian screeches and boasting a rampant harmonica, an instrument that is wielded with effective malice at key moments in the album. Here, Springsteen adopted a different persona to the rest of the album – that of a semi-repentant miscreant who *"Swore to you my darlin', you were the only one/But I had my good eye to the dark and my blind eye to the sun."* Over in three minutes, its presence lingered longer, being emphatically different from anything else on the album and suggesting an avenue, perhaps, that Springsteen could explore now that his voice has gained the pits and pockmarks of experience, so crucial to believable blues. While Neil Young, say, is able to cut loose all the time, Springsteen – on disc at least – rarely allows himself such a pleasure.

Which brings us directly to the problematic "Queen Of The Supermarket". On the surface, it was a somewhat ridiculous dancing partner to "Girls In Their Summer Clothes" from *Magic*, in which Springsteen appeared to be putting a mid-life crisis front and centre. The lyrics see Springsteen *"in a wonderful world where all you desire/And everything you've longed for is at your fingertips."* Yes, it's the supermarket, that renowned second home for multi-millionaire rock icons. But there's more. Ruling the checkout line is the titular queen of the supermarket (*"Though a company cap covers her hair/Nothing can hide the beauty waiting there"*), who our narrator has an unholy crush on. Not only does Springsteen pick up his own groceries, he does it while hitting on girls.

Springsteen has admitted he wrote the song after he made his first visit to a supermarket in a while "and thought this place is spectacular. This place is a fantasy land! The subtext in here is so heavy! They're sort of shameless, the bounty in them is overflowing. It's like, 'Do people really want to shop in this store or do they just want to screw on the floor?'" Sadly, Springsteen's song didn't take us quite that far, but he did leave us with a killer line that made the whole dubious but carefree shebang worthwhile: *"As I lift my groceries into the cart/I turn back for a moment and catch a smile/That blows this whole fucking place apart."* It's a line of reckless joie de vivre, and in an album full of songs about love, no single sentence got closer to the truth.

It also epitomised the lightheartedness that made the album so welcome but also proved to be its weak point. In spirit and temperament, *Working On A Dream* was a post-Bush album, an attempt to ride the wave of goodwill caused by Obama's election and the rejection of the Bush doctrine. But the zeitgeist was missed. The album was written and recorded as the US teetered on the brink of its worst recession since 1929 – the direct result of 30 years of out-of-control neoliberal economics – but there was nothing on *Working On A Dream* that even hinted at the tidal wave of repossessions and redundancies that were about to overwhelm Springsteen's traditional constituency.

At the time, this could be understood; the Obama effect appeared all-consuming, the feelgood factor that would drive the wolf from the door, but now it looks like an improbable oversight. One that Springsteen, surely, would be striving hard to compensate for with his next release. ✪

It's the infectious tones, polished production and lightness of touch that make *Working On A Dream* such an easy-to-down treat

THE LIVE ALBUMS

It's showtime! The power and glory of Bruce in concert, as revealed by his five official live releases. BY TERRY STAUNTON

THE POSTERS AROUND the capital in the autumn of 1975 showed the hype machine in full effect. "Finally… London is ready for Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band!" they screamed, as if heralding a rock'n'roll second coming. The aggressive marketing in the run-up to his UK live debut wasn't especially to the subject's liking, though, to the point that he was ripping up flyers at the venue just minutes before taking to the stage.

He may have been reluctant to play the promotional game, but that November 18 show at the Hammersmith Odeon was an undeniable landmark in Springsteen's career. Columbia Records knew they had a singer-songwriter of great depth and vision, yet they also knew that what set him apart from others was his formidable stage presence, his ability to connect with an audience and keep them with him for a three-hour stretch.

Even when the occasional studio album has met with a (relatively) muted response, it has never diminished the power of Springsteen as a live performer. Rock has its fair share of mesmerising frontmen, but more often than not there's an invisible barrier between the crowd and the likes of a Bowie, a Jagger or a Plant. Springsteen, however, has an innate knack for dismantling the constructs of stardom and communicating with his followers one-on-one.

Consequently, a Springsteen live album represents something more than the standard stop-gap release while the artist waits for inspiration to kick in again. Neither is it the inevitable after-the-event tour merchandise, the coda to a worldwide jaunt the likes of which the Stones have grown so fond. Springsteen's catalogue boasts five concert LPs, each staking a claim for relevance in his career trajectory.

Having spent the best part of a year crossing the globe on the back of *Born In The USA*, a tour souvenir release would have made perfect sense in marketing terms, but Springsteen instead trawled the archives for the mammoth **Live 1975-85**, issued as five vinyl albums or three CDs. Sequenced, for the most part, chronologically, the bulk of the earlier tracks come from a radio broadcast at the Roxy in Los Angeles just weeks after 1978's *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* hit the record racks (the '1975' of the title is represented by just one track, the opening "Thunder Road"), when the E Street Band were still accustomed to playing more modest indoor venues.

For all the band's might and lustre, "Rosalita" and a cover of Eddie Floyd's "Raise Your Hand" illustrate how Springsteen forges an intimate bond with his crowd, drawing them in to become part of the performance.

> **Springsteen forges an intimate bond with his crowd, drawing them in to become part of the performance…**

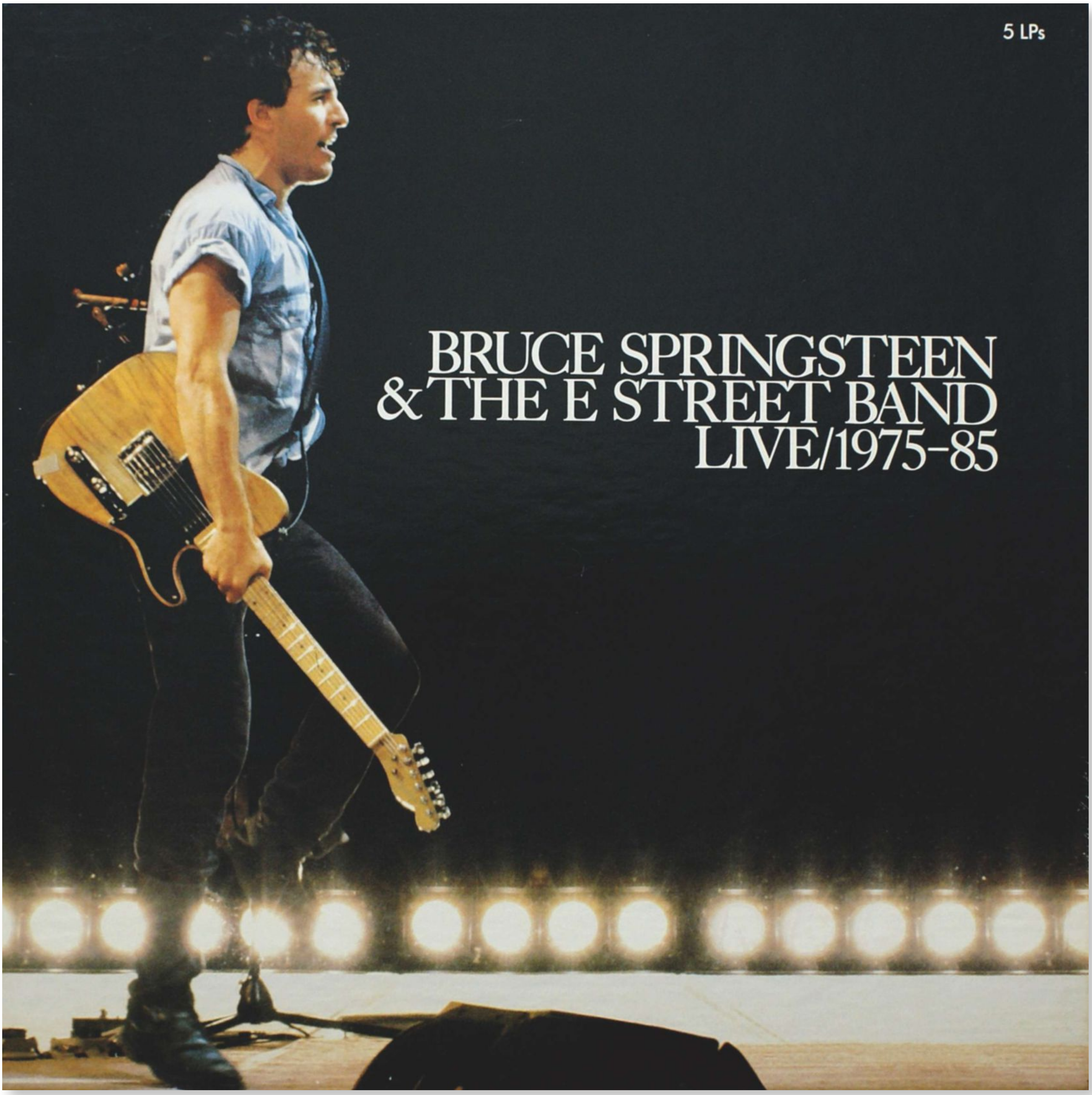
Paradoxically, when songs from *Nebraska* (the title track, "Johnny 99") are aired before an audience at later shows, they retain a clinical detachment, as if Springsteen is giving evidence in a courtroom. Across 40 tracks, the album offers wildly contrasting photofits of our hero: the tongue-in-cheek showman ("Fire"), the regretful confessor ("My Hometown"), the desperate lover ("Because The Night"), the restless outsider ("Hungry Heart"), the angry victim of corporate wrongdoing ("Seeds").

It's this last song that fiercely enforces Springsteen's everyman protest credentials. Dating from the *Born In The USA* tour of 1985, its venom surpasses even that of the album's much misunderstood title song, a hollered indictment of the economic divides brought about by the Reagan era (*"I'm sleepin' up in front with my wife/Billy club tappin' on the windshield in the middle of the night/Says 'Move along, man, move along'"*). If such a gargantuan release might initially be considered a taking-care-of-business précis of The Boss' first decade, "Seeds", with its pounding E Street funk-rock rhythm, alerts us to the fact there's still work to be done, foes to be vanquished.

In as much as the running order is determined by dates of performance, it doesn't necessarily follow that the songs' studio origins take the same route. Hence, the collection closes as if it were an actual live show; a curtain falling with the reflective "My Hometown", before an explosive 'encore' triumvirate of "Born To Run", "No Surrender" and "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out". Bruce returns to the stage one last time to send us home with the tender lullaby of "Jersey Girl", the Tom Waits song he's inadvertently made his own, and which has come to define the spiritual, emotional and – naturally – geographical heritage of everything Springsteen.

THERE WAS NO tangible heritage to draw upon for 1993's **MTV Plugged**, recorded in the sanitised confines of Warner Brothers' Hollywood studios with the musicians Springsteen enlisted for *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, whom fans dubbed "The Other Band". Playfully subverting the cable channel's popular *Unplugged* series of intimate shows (the record sleeve features a crude cross through the first two letters of the word [*see opposite*]), a solo Springsteen sticks to the format for just the opening new song, the throwaway rockabilly "Red Headed Woman".

What follows is a frustratingly CONTINUES OVER »


5 LPs
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
& THE E STREET BAND
LIVE/1975-85

BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN
IN CONCERT

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN BAND
& THE E STREET
LIVE IN
LIVE IN
NEW YORK
CITY

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
& THE E STREET BAND
HAMMERSMITH ODEON, LONDON '75

LIVE IN
DUBLIN
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
WITH THE SESSIONS BAND

mixed bag, with the new band sounding clunky and under-rehearsed, even on tracks they originated ("Better Days", "Man's Job") and woefully failing to grasp the nuances of "Atlantic City". They're closer to the intuitive spirit of the E Street Band on the newer ballads "If I Should Fall Behind" and "I Wish I Were Blind", the latter delivered with a soft calypso tinge that suggests Ben E King or Clyde McPhatter could have scored big with the song 30 or so years earlier. "Thunder Road" undergoes a minor facelift, presented in near-ballad form with Springsteen and guitar accompanied by hymnal organ courtesy of Roy Bittan, but it tends to leave the listener waiting for the rest of the E Streeters to come crashing in on the last verse.

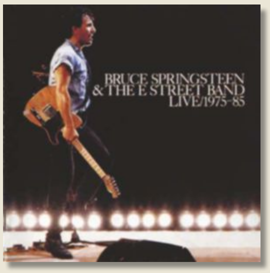
That wouldn't come until 2001's **Live In New York City**, recorded at Madison Square Garden the previous summer, a reunion so smooth and seamless it's as if the E Street Band pick up just seconds after the last smash of Max Weinberg's cymbals 12 years earlier. Yet to head back to the studio for any great length of time, the album (like the MTV set, a tie-in to a cable special, this one for HBO) serves as a recharging of batteries, and it's evident that the musicians are doing it for themselves as much as the sell-out crowd. Revisiting the past with a fresh spin, "Tenth Avenue Freeze-Out" detours into snatches from The Impressions' "It's Alright" and Al Green's "Take Me To The River", while "Two Hearts" segues into a coda of Marvin Gaye's "It Takes Two", giving the sense of Springsteen and chums dropping in on the Stone Pony or any number of East Coast clubs from their youth.

"The River" is radically reworked, stripped down to piano, sax, harmonica and accordion, to become a noir lament in the fashion of *Born To Run*'s "Meeting Across The River". They're the same characters as before, but the new setting makes their predicament sound even more hopeless. Similarly, "Born In The USA" resurfaces with just slide guitar and plaintive growl, transporting the song from cacophonous stadium to Robert Johnson's crossroads.

Of the two new songs on display, "Land Of Hope And Dreams" recalls the chest-beating optimism of the most uplifting cuts from *The River* while respectfully nodding in the direction of Woody Guthrie (it would surface on 2012's *Wrecking Ball*), its chorus based on the traditional negro spiritual, "This Train (Is Bound For Glory)". However, it's "American Skin (41 Shots)" that stands as the pivotal track of the whole set, far and away the most controversial of all Springsteen's songs, and one of the rare occasions where he's written a protest for a specific incident. Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo was shot 41 times by four officers from the NYPD's notorious street crimes unit in February 1999. Mistaking him for a serial rapist matching a similar description, the cops opened fire when Diallo reached into his jacket for identification, claiming they believed he was about to pull a gun on them. Springsteen wrote his song in the wake of the officers' acquittal by a jury a year later, debuting it at an Atlanta show a fortnight before his run of 10 gigs at Madison Square Garden. By the time the E Street Band arrived in New York, the city's Patrolmen's Benevolent Association had called for a boycott of the concerts, its chairman Patrick Lynch telling a rally of Manhattan cops, "We don't need a millionaire coming down here making money off our backs on a terrible, terrible tragedy." Mayor Rudolph Giuliani added his own condemnation: "Despite the fact that they were acquitted, there are still people trying to create the impression the police officers are guilty."

Although the lyric doesn't mention Diallo by name, nor his death, the opening couplet of the chorus (*"Is it a gun? Is it a knife? Is it a wallet? This is your life"*) was widely interpreted as referring to the trigger-happy nature of lawmen when confronting blacks. Its message is clearly important to Springsteen; as each member of the band takes their turn chanting *"41 shots"* over the opening bars, he gently admonishes those in the audience who've started to clap along. "We need some quiet," he whispers. The delicacy of the verse builds to a fiery rage of a chorus, levering the album beyond any suspicions of it being an (albeit spectacular) golden oldies show.

Considering the scale of Springsteen's latter-day performances on these shores, such as his epic Glastonbury set in 2009, it's odd to think of him being dwarfed by a venue of little more



LIVE 1975-85

Released: November 10, 1986
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau, Chuck Plotkin
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar, harmonica); Steve Van Zandt (guitar, backing vocals); Clarence Clemons (saxophone, backing vocals); Danny Federici (organ, piano, accordion, synthesiser, backing vocals); Roy Bittan (piano, synthesiser, backing vocals); Garry Tallent (bass, backing vocals); Max Weinberg (drums); Nils Lofgren (guitar, backing vocals); Patti Scialfa, Howard Kaylan and Mark Volman (baking vocals); The Miami Horns – Stan Harrison (tenor sax), Eddie Manion (baritone sax), Mark Pender (trumpet), Richie 'La Bamba' Rosenberg (trombone)
Highest chart position: UK 4; US 1

MTV PLUGGED

Released: April 12, 1993
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar, harmonica); Shane Fontayne (guitar); Crystal Taliefero (guitar, backing vocals); Tommy Sims (bass); Roy Bittan (keyboards); Zacharay Alford (drums); Gia Cambotti, Carol Dennis, Cleopatra Kennedy, Bobby King and Angel Rogers (backing vocals), Patti Scialfa (guitar, harmony vocals on "Human Touch")
Highest chart position: UK 4; US 189

LIVE IN NEW YORK CITY

Released: March 27, 2001
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Chuck Plotkin
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar, harmonica); Steve Van Zandt (guitar, backing vocals); Clarence Clemons (saxophone, backing vocals); Danny Federici (organ, piano, accordion, synthesiser, backing vocals); Roy Bittan (piano, synthesiser, backing vocals); Garry Tallent (bass, backing vocals); Max Weinberg (drums); Nils Lofgren (guitar, backing vocals); Patti Scialfa (backing vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 12; US 5

HAMMERSMITH ODEON, LONDON '75

Released: February 28, 2006
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau, Barbara Carr, Thom Zimny
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar, harmonica); Steve Van Zandt (guitar, backing vocals); Clarence Clemons (saxophone, backing vocals); Danny Federici (organ, piano, accordion, backing vocals); Roy Bittan (piano, backing vocals); Garry Tallent (bass, backing vocals); Max Weinberg (drums)
Highest chart position: UK 33; US 93

LIVE IN DUBLIN

Released: June 5, 2007
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, John Cooper
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar); Sam Bardfeld (violin, bk vocals); Art Baron (sousaphone, trombone, mandolin, penny whistle, euphonium); Frank Bruno (guitar, field drum, bk vocals); Jeremy Chatzky (bass); Larry Eagle (drums, percussion); Clark Gayton (trombone, percussion, bk vocals); Charlie Giordano (accordion, piano, organ, bk vocals); Curtis King Jnr (percussion, bk vocals); Greg Liszt (banjo, bk vocals); Lisa Lowell (bk vocals); Ed Manion (sax); Cindy Mizelle (bk vocals); Curt Ramm (trumpet); Marty Rifkin (steel guitar, dobro, mandolin); Patti Scialfa (guitar, bk vocals); Marc Anthony Thompson (guitar, bk vocals); Soozie Tyrell (violin, bk vocals)
Highest chart position: UK 21; US 23

Wembley Stadium, London, July 1985

than 3,600 seats, but there's a sense of the E Street Band huddled together for protection on **Hammersmith Odeon Live '75**, the debut UK gig belatedly released on DVD as part of 2005's *Born To Run* 30th anniversary edition, and on CD a year later. It's possible that the avalanche of pre-show hype made them a keener, more combative unit, determined to deflect any emperor's new clothes accusations.

It's a startlingly well-drilled show, to the point of rigidity at times, with "Born To Run" and "She's The One" rattled off at the expense of the atmospheric breathing space of the album versions. There's more fluidity to the playing close to the midway point, the foot easing off the pedal for "Backstreets" and "Kitty's Back", the latter's cheeky twirl into "Moondance" seemingly a nod to the Van Morrison comparisons littering Springsteen's early reviews. And despite "Jungleland" being, at the time, merely the longest track on his latest – and only modest-selling – album, it's catapulted across the hall with the ferocity and intensity of a long-admired fan favourite.

With the E Street Band enjoying another break, **Live In Dublin** sees Springsteen mixing trad folk from *We Shall Overcome* with back catalogue evergreens, accompanied by as many as 17 fellow players. Yet again, Bruce displays his consummate ease with being MC, the chief rabble rouser in what he dubbed his "folk big band". For all the raucousness of songs handed down the generations, it's the effortless way Springsteen originals slip into the traditional format that impresses; the banjo chase of "Atlantic City" could've been lifted straight from the *Bonnie & Clyde* soundtrack, while "Highway Patrolman" reveals hither to concealed Celtic roots.

If *Live In New York City* was the sound of Springsteen reconnecting with his own history, this is the album where he touches base with close to a century of American music, be it blue-collar work songs ("Erie Canal"), gospel ("This Little Light Of Mine"), or dustbowl paeans twinned with New Orleans jazz ("How Can A Poor Man Stand Such Times And Live?"). By turning back the clock on a nation's musical heritage, Bruce is showing us the keys that unlock the doors to his art, his curiosity and his limitless inspiration. ✪

COVER THEM!

50 SONGS TACKLED BY THE BOSS LIVE OR ON RECORD

- "Boom Boom" – John Lee Hooker
- "Born To Be Wild" – Steppenwolf
- "Boys" – The Shirelles
- "Brown Eyed Girl" – Van Morrison
- "California Sun" – The Rivieras
- "Can't Help Falling In Love" – Elvis Presley
- "Chimes Of Freedom" – Bob Dylan
- "Coma Girl" – Joe Strummer
- "Da Doo Ron Ron" – The Crystals
- "Double Shot Of My Baby's Love" – The Swingin' Medallions
- "Dream Baby Dream" – Suicide
- "Forever Young" – Bob Dylan
- "Gloria" – Them
- "Great Balls Of Fire" – Jerry Lee Lewis
- "Hard Times" – Stephen Foster
- "Higher And Higher" – Jackie Wilson
- "Hold On, I'm Comin'" – Sam & Dave
- "(I Don't Want To) Hang Up My Rock'n'Roll Shoes" – Chuck Willis
- "I Fought The Law" – Bobby Fuller
- "I'm Bad, I'm Nationwide" – ZZ Top
- "Jersey Girl" – Tom Waits
- "Keep The Car Running" – Arcade Fire
- "Love Of The Common People" – Nicky Thomas
- "London Calling" – The Clash
- "Louie Louie" – The Kingsmen
- "Mony Mony" – Tommy James & The Shondells
- "Mustang Sally" – Wilson Pickett
- "My Ride's Here" – Warren Zevon
- "Not Fade Away" – Buddy Holly
- "Pretty Flamingo" – Manfred Mann
- "Quarter To Three" – Gary US Bonds
- "Raise Your Hand" – Eddie Floyd
- "Ramblin' Gamblin' Man" – Bob Seger
- "Ring Of Fire" – Johnny Cash
- "Rockin' All Over The World" – John Fogerty
- "Roll Over Beethoven" – Chuck Berry
- "Save The Last Dance For Me" – The Drifters
- "Seven Nights To Rock" – Moon Mullican
- "Summertime Blues" – Eddie Cochran
- "Sweet Soul Music" – Arthur Conley
- "This Land Is Your Land" – Woody Guthrie
- "Trapped" – Jimmy Cliff
- "Twist And Shout" – The Isley Brothers
- "Viva Las Vegas" – Elvis Presley
- "War" – Edwin Starr
- "When Will I Be Loved?" – The Everly Brothers
- "Who'll Stop The Rain?" – Creedence Clearwater Revival
- "Wooly Bully" – Sam The Sham & The Pharaohs
- "You Never Can Tell" – Chuck Berry
- "You Really Got Me" – The Kinks

NEAL PRESTON/CORBIS

THE PROMISE

Brightness on the edge of town! The great lost songs of '77 and '78, reupholstered at last.

BY GRAEME THOMSON

★ 16 NOVEMBER 2010

IN THE LINER notes to *The Promise*, a double album which revisits 22 songs initially recorded in 1977 and 1978, Bruce Springsteen outlines the guiding principles for the epic sessions which eventually produced *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*. These were, he writes, "power, directness, austerity".

Famously, Springsteen was working at the time beneath two hovering storm clouds. One was the sudden onset of fame, the other a lawsuit against ex-manager Mike Appel. The evidence suggests that he found the former far more troublesome than the latter.

Having gunned to stardom in 1975 with *Born To Run*, Springsteen was now mounting a round-the-clock watching brief against frivolity and hype. He resolved that his next album would be "a reaction to my own good fortune, reflecting a sense of accountability to the people I grew up with". Where his first three records had been wild, boisterous, theatrical affairs filled with carnival music, urban gypsies and romanticised street characters, with *Darkness*… he sought to drain all that colour away, leaving only what he described as "an apocalyptic grandeur". Or as his new manager and producer Jon Landau put it: "We wanted the coffee black." He became obsessed with articulating small town reality, the hard yards of compromise, disappointment and moral ambivalence set against a post-Vietnam backdrop of social and economic depression. The music followed suit. When it finally arrived in 1978, *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* was unflinching, stripped to its bare essentials.

The heavy price Springsteen paid for this monochromatic tunnel vision is made plain on *The Promise*, an album comprised of the fat that got ruthlessly scraped from the bone as Springsteen held tight to his instincts. Having recorded some 40 songs at the Record Plant in New York during 1977 and 1978, the story of these "lost" tracks – perhaps even a Great Lost Album – is finally told here (although a handful of songs dating from these sessions turned up on *The River* and *Tracks*).

In Thom Zimny's excellent film, which accompanies the deluxe version of *The Promise*, we see the overflowing notebooks and "junkyard of stuff" from which Springsteen carved the pared-down husk of *Darkness*… Zimny's film captures both the exasperation and admiration of Landau and the E Street Band as their boss pursues the sound in his head to the exclusion of everything else. He deliberately discards anything that reeks of what he calls "the never-ending

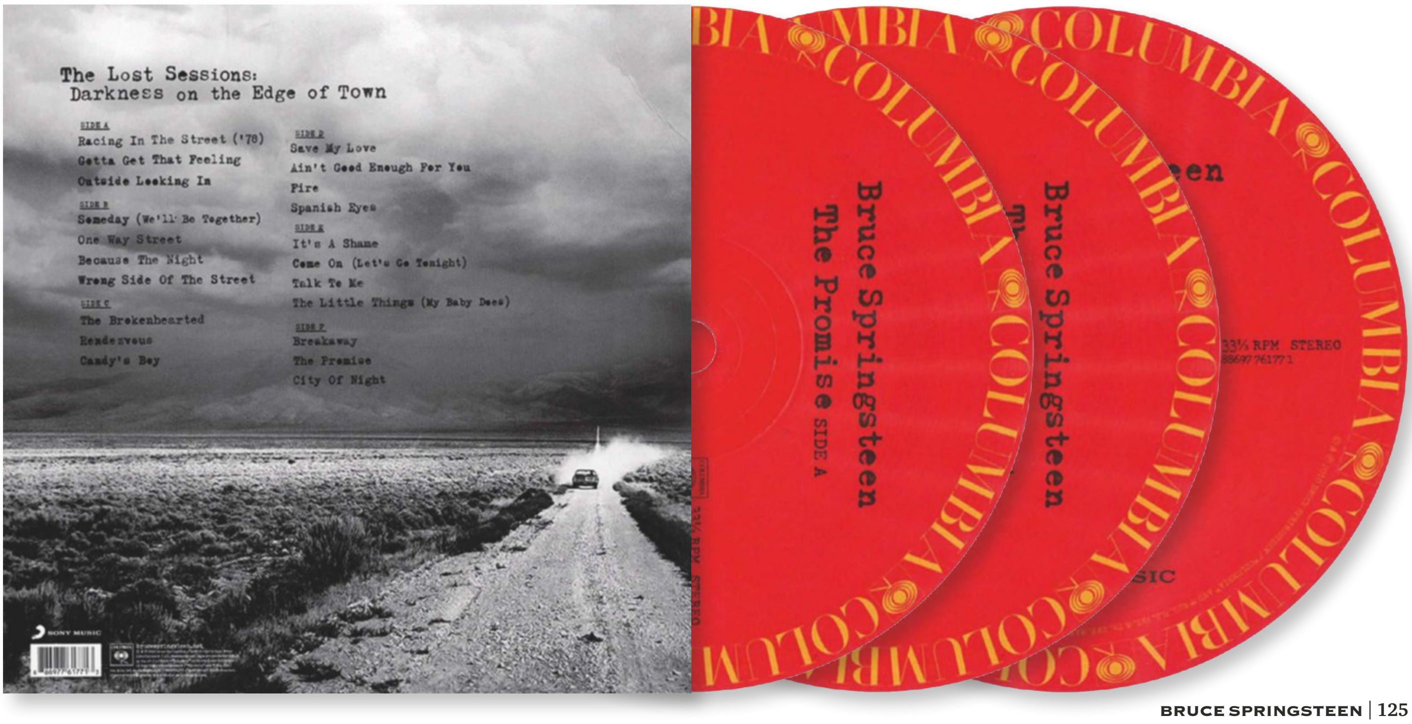
CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

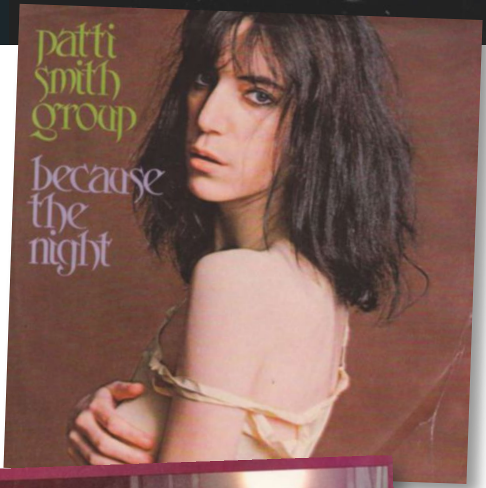
1 Racing In The Street ('78) ★★★★
2 Gotta Get That Feeling ★★★
3 Outside Looking In ★★★
4 Someday (We'll Be Together) ★★★
5 One Way Street ★★★★
6 Because The Night ★★★★
7 Wrong Side Of The Street ★★
8 The Brokenhearted ★★★
9 Rendezvous ★★
10 Candy's Boy ★★★
11 Save My Love ★★★
12 Ain't Good Enough For You ★★★★
13 Fire ★★★★
14 Spanish Eyes ★★
15 It's A Shame ★★★
16 Come On (Let's Go Tonight) ★★★
17 Talk To Me ★★★
18 The Little Things (My Baby Does) ★★★
19 Breakaway ★★★
20 The Promise ★★★★★
21 City Of Night ★★★★
22 The Way (hidden track) ★★★★

Released: November 16, 2010
Label: Columbia
Recorded at: Record Plant, New York (1977-78); Stone Hill Studios, New Jersey (2010)
Produced by: Bruce Springsteen, Jon Landau, Steve Van Zandt
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (lead vocals, lead guitar, harmonica); Roy Bittan (piano, vocals); Clarence Clemons (saxophone, vocals); Danny Federici (organ, glockenspiel); Patti Scialfa (backing vocals); Garry Tallent (bass); Steve Van Zandt (rhythm guitar, vocals); Max Weinberg (drums); Tiffany Andrews, Corinda Crawford, Antoinette Savage, Soozie Tyrell, Michelle Moore (backing vocals); Barry Danielian, Rick Gazda, Bob Muckin, Curt Ramm (trumpet); Stan Harrison (tenor sax); Ed Manion (baritone sax); Dan Levine, Richie Rosenberg (trombone); David Lindley (fiddle)
Highest chart position: UK 7; US 16

Bruce Springsteen The Promise


The Lost Sessions:
Darkness on the Edge of Town
SIDE A
Racing In The Street ('78)
Gotta Get That Feeling
Outside Looking In
SIDE B
Someday (We'll Be Together)
One Way Street
Because The Night
Wrong Side Of The Street
SIDE C
The Brokenhearted
Rendezvous
Candy's Boy
SIDE D
Save My Love
Ain't Good Enough For You
Fire
Spanish Eyes
SIDE E
It's A Shame
Come On (Let's Go Tonight)
Talk To Me
The Little Things (My Baby Does)
SIDE F
Breakaway
The Promise
City Of Night
COLUMBIA
Bruce Springsteen
The Promise SIDE A
33⅓ RPM STEREO

The E Street Band circa 1978: (l-r) Roy Bittan, Clarence Clemons, Garry Tallent, Max Weinberg, Springsteen, Steve Van Zandt, Danny Federici



now" of pop music, and instead dedicates himself to enduring themes of truth and consequence.

This strict recruitment policy allowed no songs of release or escape, no chance of respite. There are no fun Friday nights on *Darkness…*, but a writer as instinctive and apparently prolific as Springsteen couldn't simply turn off that wellspring. Running on a parallel track to the Steinbeckian seam which he hit upon during this period is another Springsteen, the one who mainlines pop history and is capable of knocking out three-minute jukebox classics seemingly at will. This is the guy who shows up most often on *The Promise*, a guy whose only option at the time was to give these killer songs away to deserving homes. Which is why The Pointer Sisters, via Robert Gordon's original cover, scored a huge hit with "Fire", and Patti Smith – recording *Easter* in the studio next door – was given the chance to put her stamp on "Because The Night".

The Promise, then, can be neatly contextualised as the extrovert, effervescent twin of *Darkness…*, but it also stands up as an album in its own right. Partly, this is down to its unusual constitution. These are mainly mongrel recordings, on which the bones of the original 1970s takes are augmented by contemporary additions recorded at Springsteen's farm studio in 2010. "Where needed, I worked on them to bring them to fruition," he writes in the liner notes. "Many stand as they were recorded all those years ago."

Not that many, actually. The retouching is most frequent – and apparent – on the lead vocals, presumably because on many of the original tracks Springsteen never got further than a guide vocal; thus, *The Promise* offers the listener the slightly bizarre experience of hearing a 60-year-old man trying to impersonate his 28-year-old self. A modern hand is also evident in the addition of strings, horns and backing vocals, and in more fleshed- out arrangements. In the case of "Save My Love", the performance of a song written in the 1970s is completely new.

The balance between the past and present isn't entirely seamless but it is, by and large, negotiated with taste and finesse. If at times the blend gives *The Promise* an odd, unreal air, it also lends it a unique sonic identity, placing the record somewhere between the loose swing of mid-'70s Springsteen and the crisper

dynamics of his more recent records.

In contrast to its lowering cover photograph, the contents are a colourful rag bag of warm pastiche, knockabout romps, melodramatic balladry and retreads of familiar archetypes, alongside a handful of gems of real substance. Where the 10 tracks on *Darkness…* were honed to sustain a very specific mood, the songs on *The Promise* aren't beholden to such stark or grandiose intentions. Often, their ambitions stretch no further than loosely approximating the best of good-time bar band rock'n'roll, feverish R&B, AM radio soul and classic '60s pop. Befitting a record which often puts the emphasis on the music rather than the lyrics, there's plenty of short-hand Springsteen lore concerning streets and nights. These are songs about going out, meeting girls, winning and losing love. You can see why he felt that tossed-off lines like "*We ain't got no money but we don't care*" had no place on *Darkness…*, but they work just fine in a setting where hope has at least a fighting chance. Witness "Save My Love", a big, open-hearted embrace on which Roy Bittan's piano and Max Weinberg's drums frame a classic tale of optimism against all the odds.

There's a pleasing sense that these songs were written quickly and knocked out with ease. Some of them are the work of an unashamed fan-boy, Springsteen confirming that he's a neat mimic as he apes his heroes. He gruffly channels Buddy Holly on the rat-a-tat "Outside Looking In", returns to Roy Orbison on "The Brokenhearted" and "Someday (We'll Be Together)", and reboots "When You Walk In The Room" by The Searchers on the jangling "Rendezvous". Though "Fire" was a 1979 hit for The Pointer Sisters, it was written after seeing Elvis Presley perform in Philadelphia in 1977, and sounds like it. Over an easy, airy, bass-heavy groove, The Boss channels The King. The fantastic "City Of Night" makes it plain that Springsteen had caught wind of the other Elvis, too. His close-up, rasping vocal is a clear nod to Costello, while the staccato "*hey hey*"s mimic "Less Than Zero". He happily indulges a continuing obsession with Phil Spector on "The Little Things (My Baby Does)" and the pulsating "Gotta Get That Feeling", which throws everything – breathless drums, walls of horns, frantic call-and-response backing vocals – at what might otherwise have been a fairly routine rabble-rouser.

There is trainspotterish fun to be had, too, in joining the dots between some of the more embryonic songs on *The Promise* and tracks Springsteen later released on his official albums. Here, the full-blooded tilt at "Racing In The Street ('78)" feels explicitly like a sequel to "Thunder Road", opening with the same combination of dramatic piano and lonesome harmonica. It lacks the haunted, reined-in emotional heft of the *Darkness…* version, and the melody is a mere suggestion rather than a hard fact, but it builds with a propulsive energy which suits the mood of this particular record. The unremarkable "Spanish Eyes" kicks off with a couplet which eventually found a home in 1984 on "I'm On Fire", and "Candy's Boy" scratches – fairly orthodoxly – at an idea that would blossom into the much more ambitious "Candy's Room". The sombre "Come On (Let's Go Tonight)", which takes its emotional cues from "the night Elvis Presley died", has the same music and melody as *Darkness…*'s "Factory".

It's a consistently enjoyable ride, but it's not hard to understand why initially much of *The Promise* was set aside. The poor-boy blues of "Ain't Good Enough For You" is classic boardwalk fare, with its irresistible rolling rhythm, hollering backing vocals and handclaps, a raucous party vibe going down stage left. It's the kind of song Springsteen seems able to write in his sleep, but no less fun for all that. Likewise, "Talk To Me" and "It's A Shame" are genial B-grade Boss, letting off steam with his buddies down at the Stone Pony. At these times, the songs on *The Promise* feel closest to what they were presumably regarded as at the time: the surface rock which Springsteen had to drill through in order to reach the hard diamonds on *Darkness…* Collectively, they're an impressive document of one man's creative gifts firing off in all directions, but ultimately heavier on perspiration than inspiration.

There is, however, a smattering of true magnificence on *The Promise*, songs that elevate it far beyond a historical footnote. "One Way Street" is slow, sad and lovely, Clarence Clemons' sax splitting the neon-lit melancholy like a flashing blue light. "Because The Night" is similarly excellent, Springsteen singing Patti Smith's rewritten lyrics rather than his original words in acknowledgement that her version became the definitive reading. Like Bob Dylan performing "All Along The Watchtower", it has now, in effect, become a cover version of one of the artist's own compositions.

If we regard *The Promise* as the closest thing to the album which would have filled the three-year hiatus between *Born To Run* and its successor, then the final run of tracks make perfect sense in the manner in which they seem to bridge that gap. The sprawling party sounds of the album eventually give way to a chilly, sombre dawn that presages *Darkness…* The doomed "Breakaway" relocates Sonny from "Racing In The Street" to the hotel room where "*he dealt his life away*". A tale of impossible choices and the ransoms that one day must be met, it bleeds into the six-minute title track, a song which its author ultimately felt didn't belong on *Darkness…*, though it's hard now to see why. A vast, stately thing, the elegant changes, sweeping strings and Bittan's heart-tugging piano give "The Promise" the epic grandeur of classic Springsteen. Lyrically, it takes the local schism with Mike Appel as the starting point for an opaque morality tale about two friends rent asunder by their actions. Blame is not directly apportioned; as ever, it's more complicated than that. Namechecking "Thunder Road", Springsteen sings: *"The promise is broken, you go on living/It steals something from down in your soul"*, and it's suddenly clear precisely where he would be heading next.

These kind of clues and portents make *The Promise* more than just a fine, fun record in its own right. Woven into these songs is a fascinating narrative concerning an artist in the throes of a career-altering metamorphosis, embarking on a final journey away from the boardwalk and into the Badlands. ✪

THE CRITICS' VERDICT…

★ "Though recorded during the same extended sessions as *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, this archival LP is the polar opposite of its fraternal twin: big, bold, vibrantly coloured and laced with sweeping hooks and towering middle eights. In a word, spectacular."
BUD SCOPPA, UNCUT, NOVEMBER 2010

★ "With the USA rapidly descending into farce it's left to Bruce Springsteen to shoulder the burden of dignity, and *The Promise* does just that; it's a riveting portrait of a musician at the height of his powers."
ALEX DENNEY, NME, NOVEMBER 20, 2010

There is fun to be had in joining the dots between the more embryonic songs and tracks later released on official albums

WRECKING BALL

Tom Joad is reborn as a vigilante hitman, as Springsteen righteously rages against the bankers and fat cats. BY NICK HASTED

5 MARCH 2012

When he set out on the road to *Wrecking Ball*, Bruce Springsteen had meant to make a gospel album, but ended up replacing it, unfinished, with a more urgent response to the times. The record that he did make "started out as folk music", he told *Rolling Stone*, "just me and a guitar singing these songs." Keeping "We Take Care Of Our Own", "Shackled And Drawn" and "Rocky Ground" from the gospel LP, he added other songs which wrestled with hope and salvation, while grounding them all in the material need to work and eat in post-crash America. *Wrecking Ball* boils with a rage rarely heard in Springsteen's music before, using poisonous language to describe his country's ruling class, and narrating vengeful impulses to gun bankers down in their tracks.

"This is as direct a record as I've ever made… with the possible exception of *Nebraska*," Springsteen added to *Rolling Stone*, "which this record has a lot in common with." But *Wrecking Ball* wasn't as stark as the demo-based *Nebraska*, and was utterly unlike his other 20th-century protest album, *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, whose lyrics were often softened by the prevailing sepia, monochrome mood. Unlike those two albums, *Wrecking Ball* didn't try to reroute Springsteen's career. Instead its gospel and folk strands were woven into a huge, wild sound. Though the E Street Band only appeared as individual musicians thinly scattered through the tracks, the points of reference were *Born In The USA* and *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*'s moments of maximum, radio-slaying impact, spliced with *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*' rambunctious, rough energy.

Wrecking Ball's inspiration was explained with lucid directness when Springsteen introduced it at a Paris press conference. "The genesis of the record was after 2008," he said, "when we had the huge financial crisis in the States… I had friends who were losing their homes, and nobody went to jail. Nobody was responsible… a basic theft had occurred that struck at the heart of what the entire America idea was about." He personalised his dismay by recalling his fraught Asbury Park adolescence, under the roof of a father bitterly struggling for work: "The deepest motivation… comes out of the house that I grew up in and the circumstances that were there,

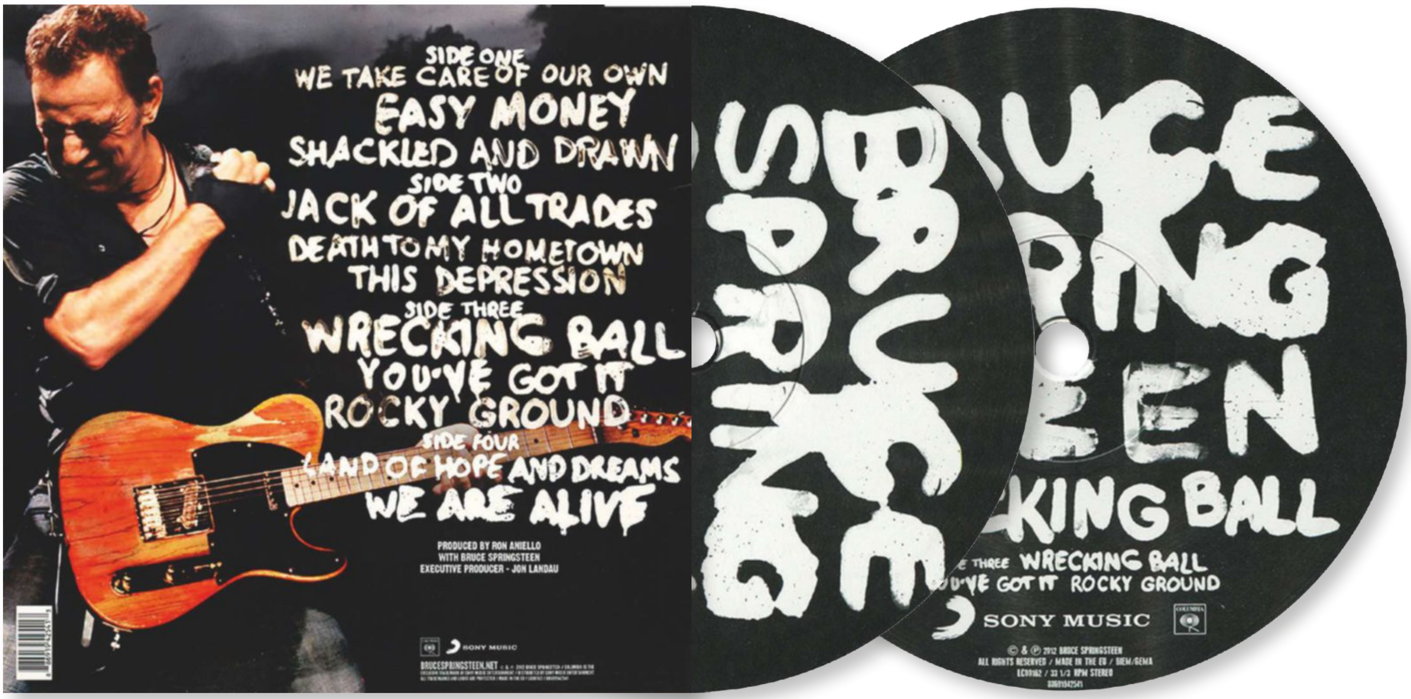
CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1 We Take Care Of Our Own ★★★★
2 Easy Money ★★★★
3 Shackled And Drawn ★★★★
4 Jack Of All Trades ★★★★★
5 Death To My Hometown ★★★★
6 This Depression ★★★
7 Wrecking Ball ★★★★★
8 You've Got It ★★
9 Rocky Ground ★★★
10 Land Of Hope And Dreams ★★★★★
11 We Are Alive ★★★★★

Released: March 5 2012
Label: Sony Music/Columbia
Produced by: Ron Aniello with Bruce Springsteen
Recorded at: Stone Hill Studio, New Jersey, MSR Studio B, Very Loud House Studio
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitars, banjo, piano, organ, drums, percussion, loops); Ron Aniello (guitar, bass, keyboards, drums, loops, backing vocals); Matt Chamberlain (drums, percussion); Max Weinberg (drums); Steve Jordan (percussion); Kevin Buell (drums, backing vocals); Charlie Giordano (accordion, piano, B-3 organ); Marc Muller (pedal steel guitar); Tom Morello (electric guitar); Greg Leisz (banjo, mandola, lap steel); Rob Lebret (electric guitar, backing vocals); Darrell Leonard (trumpet, bass trumpet); Curt Ramm (trumpet, cornet); Clark Gayton (trombone); Stan Harrison (clarinet, alto sax, tenor sax); Ed Manion (tenor sax, baritone sax); Dan Levine (alto horn, euphonium); Art Baron (euphonium, tuba, sousaphone, penny whistle); Clarence Clemons (sax); Soozie Tyrell (violin, backing vocals); Patti Scialfa, Lisa Lowell, Michelle Moore, Cindy Mizelle, Ross Petersen, Clif Norrell, Antoinette Savage, Corinda Carford, Tiffeny Andrews, Soloman Cobbs, Lilly Brown (backing vocals); New York Chamber Consort; Victorious Gospel Choir
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 1

BRUCE
SPRING
STEEN
WRECKING BALL
11 NEW RECORDINGS
FEATURING
"WE TAKE CARE
OF OUR OWN"
"ROCKY GROUND"
180 GRAM VINYL
ALSO CONTAINS CD
OF COMPLETE ALBUM


SIDE ONE
WE TAKE CARE OF OUR OWN
EASY MONEY
SHACKLED AND DRAWN
SIDE TWO
JACK OF ALL TRADES
DEATH TO MY HOMETOWN
THIS DEPRESSION
SIDE THREE
WRECKING BALL
YOU'VE GOT IT
ROCKY GROUND
SIDE FOUR
LAND OF HOPE AND DREAMS
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DANNY CLINCH

which is mirrored around the United States with the level of unemployment we have now." He spoke approvingly of the Occupy Wall Street movement. His own further radicalisation by events was shown when asked if he thought his increasingly fractured and unequal country could be fixed. "There's a critical mass point at which a society collapses," he said. "Is it irreparable? I don't know the answer to your question."

A lone electric guitar and amp on a concrete floor was pictured inside *Wrecking Ball*'s gatefold sleeve, symbolising Springsteen's initial, basic approach. A new producer, after four successful albums with Brendan O'Brien (and the self-produced *Seeger Sessions*), also bolstered his arsenal before anyone else stepped in the room. Ron Aniello, a hit pop gospel producer and co-producer of Patti Scialfa's *Play It As It Lays* (2007), had been the obvious choice to finish Springsteen's gospel album. Staying on board for *Wrecking Ball*, Springsteen valued his "large library" of "hip-hop and alternative" sounds, letting the pair loop and layer tracks alone. Nineteen further musicians, a gospel choir and a chamber string section were eventually added to a record which finished by chucking in the *Born To Run*-style, Spectoresque kitchen sink.

"We Take Care Of Our Own" certainly blasted out of the radio with both fists swinging. The drum tattoo and whirring keyboard which begin this first single are, like everything on it except the New York Chamber Consort's symphonic soul-style strings and some backing vocals, played by Springsteen and Aniello. The song's sentiment seems equally forceful, but echoes "Born In The USA"'s ambiguous, easily misconstrued patriotism. *"Wherever this flag's flown, we take care of our own,"* Springsteen roars, and the music soars with the sense of an American community making a stand in troubled times.

> ***Wrecking Ball*** **boils with rage, using poisonous language to describe his country's ruling class**

But this is an America that reaches *"from the shotgun shack to the Superdome,"* referencing the New Orleans stadium where the Katrina-stranded citizens were left to rot. That was the only contradictory detail that really registered; the news that *"the road of good intentions has gone dry as a bone"* is easier to miss in the mix. The lyrics mostly borrow from the language of patriotic anthems and soul and gospel fervour. Springsteen trusted his listeners would make the effort to spot his `ambiguities, but it is a deliberately affirmative song, using gospel's ascending structures as it makes a rushing climb to its finish, bolstered by strings, loops, trebly keyboards, and wild whoops and barks. When a superficial reading of "Born In The USA" saw Reagan adopt it, Springsteen had rejected the association. Despite misgivings over Obama's first term, he let this President use it regularly on the re-election trail, its hopeful surface sense fitting perfectly.

"We Take Care Of Our Own" got people's attention. But Springsteen also placed it at *Wrecking Ball*'s start for conceptual reasons. Its title "asks the question the record tries to answer," he explained. "Which is… do we take care of our own? And often we don't." Starting the album with such a rocketing climax, meanwhile, brought its own requirements. "If you write a really big song at the beginning," he

explained with relish, "the record demands to gain size as it goes along."

"Easy Money" was the first song written specifically for *Wrecking Ball*. "We Take Care Of Our Own"'s unhinged, looped whoops spill into what sounds like a sickened, woozy jig, a bitter hoedown whose Appalachian fiddles and gospel choruses are belied by the tale told by Springsteen in his gruffest, folksiest voice. "Easy Money" is about a couple going out on the town to rob at pistol-point, following the example of the partying *"fat cats"*. The most telling line amidst the music's desperate vigour describes a silent, deadly crime: *"There's nothing to it, mister, you won't hear a sound/When your whole world comes tumbling down."*

"Death To My Hometown" expands on this idea, in a deliberate, darkened sequel to *Born In The USA*'s "My Hometown". Where the latter song gently laments a town emptied by racial tension and shut factories, the cause of its ghostliness left unspoken, here the death is murder. After listing the traditional cannon-fire and bloodshed accompanying a city's invasion and pillage, Springsteen describes the arrival of capitalism's modern marauders: *"I awoke on a quiet night, I never heard a sound"*. Families, factories, homes and bodies are left for the vultures anyway. The click-boom of a safety-catch and gunshot are the sound of (maybe) symbolic retaliation, to *"send the robber barons straight to hell/The greedy thieves who came around/And ate the flesh of everything they found."* If they're even human, then, these asset-strippers are cannibals. Crunching Irish bar-room rock, complete with penny whistle, "Death To My Hometown" is a rallying song for shattered communities needing one.

"Shackled And Drawn", left over from the gospel project, is about the dignity of labour – *"Stand back, son, and let a man work/…freedom son's a dirty shirt"* – a work song for times without work. Full of blues language and a chain-gang feel, honest toil feels more like slavery when you glance at the party *"up on Banker's Hill"*. Though placed immediately before "Death To My Hometown", "Jack Of All Trades" is the shocking climax to these feelings of vengeful, helpless despair. Its intro couldn't feel more like gospel, with its simple piano, vocal, heartbeat drum and soft cymbal tish. The worker here is humbly faithful, taking *"the work that God provides"*, and awaiting the day when *"we'll start caring for each other, like Jesus said that we might."* A trumpet fanfare and slide guitar seem to support his assumption that an American willing to do any work available will always be OK, and provide for his family. But as the song continues, Springsteen's voice cracks and shakes, sinking fatalistically as he keeps promising, *"we'll be alright"*. With no change in tone, this uncomplaining, salt of the earth American continues, *"If I had me a gun, I'd find the bastards and shoot them on sight/I'm a Jack of all trades, we'll be alright."* Denied all other employment, with the American Dream's most basic promise nakedly, contemptuously broken, he'll try his hand as an assassin for the working class. This is Tom Joad as vigilante hitman, Dirty Harry as a left-wing avenger, and Springsteen sympathising with revolutionary violence. He was vaguer when pressed in interviews. But following his own anger to its logical conclusion, "Jack Of All Trades" is his most politically radical song – one Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs or the young Dylan would happily own, using blistering language rarely heard from a star since "With God On Our Side". If America's rulers still worried about rock or folk really changing things, there might have been hell to pay. As it was, it was a relief to hear someone with a voice Springsteen's size being so furious about staggering injustice.

Such honest despair had been lacking from *The Rising*, which had brought Springsteen back to the heart of national debate with its unifying uplift in the face of 9/11. But *Wrecking Ball* isn't defeatist, either, and more typically American hope rises through its second half – a shift from "angry to… angry but constructive", Springsteen explained. "Wrecking Ball" was written to mourn the demolition of NJ's Giants Stadium in 2010, and Springsteen had debuted the song at the final concerts there the previous year. In a way, it's a more complete version of *Born In The USA*'s "Glory Days". The stadium's concrete collapses like *"youth and beauty"*, taking communal sporting memories with it: *"All our little victories and glories have been turned into parking lots."* But the music says something else, fiddles and tambourines decorating heartland rock that's made to be roared out in other stadiums. The guitars toughen for a lift-off that feels like a resurrection as Springsteen taunts, standing tall in the ruins: *"C'mon and take your best shot!"*

There are a couple more throwaway songs before the final run-in – "This Depression"'s perhaps appropriately flat statement of personal despair, and "You've Got It"'s off-topic, bar-room affirmation. "Land Of Hope And Dreams" then offers another glorious high, using the traditional, transmuting image of a moving train to carry the listener forward to a still promised land, where *"faith will be rewarded"*. This is made more moving by the last appearance of a musician who played on the song when the E Street Band first recorded it, on *Live In New York City* (2001). Clarence Clemons had died on June 18, 2011 and, as Springsteen's voice clenches for the healing chorus, the Big Man's sax rises, relentlessly driving the music higher. The Impressions' "People Get Ready" and a last, quiet call and response closes this towering statement, suggesting that, against the earlier songs' evidence, America will get better.

"We Are Alive" tops even that. Here, Springsteen enlists American ghosts against present oppression. Beginning with a crackle like a 78 fading in on the radio, Mexican mariachi brass and Celtic banjo play on a song Springsteen imagines being sung beneath graveyards, by earlier victims: the 108 shot dead during a railroad strike in Maryland and other states in 1877, the four black children murdered by a Ku Klux Klan time-bomb under a church in 1963, and Mexican migrants left for dead now. In an extraordinary vision, Springsteen imagines himself waking in a grave, and shrugging it off alongside the souls of these earlier dead, to *"carry the spark"* of resistance. The flesh fails, the song suggests, but we may not. There's a hopeful whistle as *Wrecking Ball* fades away.

It was only when Springsteen toured the album that its full strength became apparent. A Boss who had seemed creakily playful when pushing *Working On A Dream* at 2009's Glastonbury was majestic again. Moved to make new music worthy of desperate times, he matched anything in his past. ✪

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ "There's an inescapable impression that, decades on from the great romantic blue-collar gestures of *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, *The River* and *Born In The USA*, he realises that for men and women 30 years older than then, losing one's job is so much closer to losing one's life." ANDY GILL, UNCUT, MARCH 2012

★ "If ever America needed a fired-up Boss doing what he does best – in his words, 'measuring the distance between the American Dream and American reality' – it's in 2012. And boy oh boy, is Bruce fired up." HAMISH MACBAIN, NME, MARCH 3, 2012

HIGH HOPES

"I go to work and I earn my pay..." On tour, the Boss and a new right-hand man take care of unfinished business. BY ANDREW MUELLER

★ 14 JANUARY 2014

IT IS AT least arguable that Bruce Springsteen's 21st century renaissance began with a song that he didn't get around to releasing a studio version of until 14 years into the 2000s, on this, his 18th studio album. On June 4th, 2000, Springsteen was playing the second of two nights at the Philips Arena in Atlanta. He was some of the way into yet another one of the longish tours he was undertaking at around this time, apparently for want of much better to do. The 1990s had been a period of extraordinary prosperity for many Americans, but Springsteen had faltered amid the gold rush, uncharacteristically sporadic swings of his pick striking dirt. His decade's labours had yielded just three albums: the best, 1995's *The Ghost Of Tom Joad*, a gloomy and fretful work which, in the context of the boom America was enjoying, saw Springsteen (relatively) unprofitably self-cast as some cowl-clad Jeremiah, clanging a bell and insisting that we were all, despite appearances, doomed.

Seven songs into the show at the Philips, Springsteen introduced a new one. It was inspired by the death the previous year of Amadou Diallo, a 22-year-old Guinean immigrant to the United States, who had been shot dead by New York City police outside his apartment block in The Bronx. The officers had challenged Diallo, believing he resembled a rape suspect they were pursuing. Diallo had reached into his pocket, and the police had not waited to see what for. Springsteen's new song was called "American Skin (41 Shots)", for the fusillade the police had unloaded at Diallo. Three months before Springsteen sang it for the first time, the cops had been acquitted of second-degree murder.

"American Skin (41 Shots)" is one of Springsteen's best-realised protest songs, channeling the grim fatalism of people who have learned the hard way that their interactions with the state will always be refracted through their colour

CONTINUES OVER »

TRACKMARKS

1. High Hopes ★★★
2. Harry's Place ★★★
3. American Skin (41 Shots) ★★★★
4. Just Like Fire Would ★★★★
5. Down In The Hole ★★★
6. Heaven's Wall ★★★
7. Frankie Fell In Love ★★★
8. This Is Your Sword ★★★
9. Hunter Of Invisible Game ★★★
10. The Ghost Of Tom Joad ★★★★★
11. The Wall ★★★★
12. Dream Baby Dream ★★★★

Released: January 14, 2014
Label: Columbia
Producer: Ron Aniello, Brendan O'Brien, Bruce Springsteen
Recorded: Various studios
Personnel: Bruce Springsteen (vocals, guitar, drums); Roy Bittan (piano); Danny Federici (organ); Nils Lofgren (guitar); Steve Van Zandt (guitar, vocals); Tom Morello (guitar); Garry Tallent (bass); Patty Scialfa (vocals); Soozie Tyrell (backing vocals); Clarence Clemons (saxophone); Jake Clemons (saxophone); Max Weinberg (drums, percussion); Ron Aniello (synthesisers, accordion); Curt Ramm (coronet)
Highest chart position: UK 1; US 1

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
HIGH HOPES

SIDE 1 HIGH HOPES FEATURING TOM MORELLO
HARRY'S PLACE* FEATURING TOM MORELLO
AMERICAN SKIN (41 SHOTS) FEATURING TOM MORELLO
SIDE 2 JUST LIKE FIRE WOULD FEATURING TOM MORELLO
DOWN IN THE HOLE*
HEAVEN'S WALL* FEATURING TOM MORELLO
SIDE 3 FRANKIE FELL IN LOVE
THIS IS YOUR SWORD
HUNTER OF INVISIBLE GAME* FEATURING TOM MORELLO
SIDE 4 THE GHOST OF TOM JOAD FEATURING TOM MORELLO
THE WALL
DREAM BABY DREAM
BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
HIGH
SIDE 1 HIGH HOPES
SIDE 3 FRANKIE FELL IN LOVE
THIS IS YOUR SWORD
HUNTER OF INVISIBLE GAME

(*"If an officer stops you/Promise me you'll always be polite/And that you'll never ever run away/Promise Mama you'll keep your hands in sight."*) Springsteen had inhabited this – for him – counter-intuitively weary, beaten voice before, on much of *Nebraska* and *The Ghost of Tom Joad*. But "American Skin (41 Shots)" was also laced with something of his own anger, that of a proud American who had grown unproud of some aspects of his country – a theme that would anchor *Devils & Dust*, *Magic* and *Wrecking Ball*.

So why did Springsteen wait so long to release a definitive studio version of what was clearly an important song? Part of the answer may have been the equivocal reaction it initially elicited, especially when he performed "American Skin (41 Shots)" during June 2000's 10-night stand at Madison Square Garden. It's tough to think of a more bedrock Springsteen fan than an NYC cop, and they were not unforthcoming about their displeasure with the song. There were calls for a boycott by New York's finest, harrumphs of disapproval from the Commissioner and the Mayor, and a statement from the Head of the Fraternal Order of Police calling Springsteen a "dirtbag" and, for good measure, "a floating fag". The song appeared on the live album recorded at MSG, then faded from the setlist.

DANNY CLINCH

In 2012, Springsteen began playing "American Skin (41 Shots)" again, dedicating it "for Trayvon" – Trayvon Martin, a black teenager from Florida, who had been shot dead by neighbourhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman. The song had a new cause – and not long after, a new sound, lit up by Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello, deputising in the E Street Band for Steve Van Zandt, otherwise engaged in Norway filming *Lilyhammer*. As *New Yorker* editor David Remnick heard it, the new take on the song was "less subdued, far tougher, as if to underline the outrage." On *High Hopes* it sounds exactly this – but it also sounds the only compelling selling point of an album which otherwise often sounds uncertain vis-à-vis the point of itself.

This was to an extent inevitable. *High Hopes* was not intended as a cohesive, coherent artistic statement in the way that its immediate predecessors had been. Recorded in studios around the world during downtime on the *Wrecking Ball* tour, *High Hopes* is a curious gallimaufry of covers, new takes on old work, songs – like "American Skin (41 Shots)" – which Springsteen had never gotten round to recording properly, and half-finished ideas revivified (hence the posthumous appearance in some credits of E Street Band stalwarts Danny Federici and Clarence Clemons, who had died in 2008 and 2011 respectively.)

The opening title track encapsulates a general sense that this is Springsteen clearing both cupboards and cobwebs, in that it's a song he had recorded before (on 1996's "Blood Brothers" EP), and was written by somebody else (The Havalinas' Tim Scott McConnell). It's cast here as ornery gospel rockabilly, blasted with brass and – for hardly the last time – foregrounding Morello's furious, demented soloing (Springsteen opens the album's liner notes with a protracted chapeau-doffing in Morello's direction, saying, "Tom and his guitar became my muse, pushing the rest of this project to another level. Thanks for the inspiration, Tom.")

There are two other cover versions on *High Hopes*. One is the slowly-built but eventually monumental reading of Suicide's "Dream Baby Dream" that closes the album (in an untrumpable endorsement, Alan Vega, one of its composers, has said he wants Springsteen's version ringing down his own curtain, as his preferred funeral soundtrack.) The other is The Saints' lovely "Just Like Fire Would", drawn from the mid-'80s period in which the Brisbane punk pathfinders were reinventing themselves, following the departure of founding guitarist Ed Kuepper, as country-rock statesmen with a terse line in

unmistakably Springstonian working man's blues (*"I go to work and I earn my pay, Lord/The sweat it falls to the ground"*). Springsteen's version is at least as faithful to the original as the original was faithful to Springsteen, and prompts the thought that he should undertake further exploration of Australian rock'n'roll of the same era – the E Street Band setting about Cold Chisel's "Bow River", Hunters & Collectors' "Say Goodbye" or Paul Kelly & The Coloured Girls' "To Her Door" would be something to hear.

Given the means by which *High Hopes* was assembled, it would be unfair to use it as the basis for overly withering judgements of where Springsteen is at, or where he might go next. But enough of it is sufficiently average that it's hard not to see the pre-release emphasis of its piecemeal nature as an exercise in expectation-management. Part of the problem, such as it is, is perhaps the listener's over-familiarity, five albums into their relationship, with what Springsteen's favoured 21st-century producer Brendan O'Brien does with the songs, tending to emphasise the pop at the expense of the rock, the heart rather than the muscle. This has had some wondrous results ("Girls In Their Summer Clothes", "Long Time Comin'", "Working On A Dream"), but occasionally leaves one wondering if more is being stored up than unleashed. Which, presumably, is where Morello – who appears on eight of these 12 tracks – comes in. And while he often does so to invigorating effect, he's also occasionally guilty – though more likely allowed/encouraged by his smitten boss – of turning proceedings into the Tom Morello Show, featuring Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band.

Some tracks on *High Hopes* are cases in both points. "Harry's Place", benched during the sessions for *The Rising*, is a plausible portrait of some insalubrious demi-monde, Springsteen as Dashiell Hammett with a guitar, narrating as if over an upturned collar and through a cloud of cigarette smoke (*"Downtown hipsters drinkin' up the drug line,"* etc.) But it just sounds mad, like the results of an inexplicable attempt to recreate the worst of 1980s production with the slickest of 21st century technology. Even balancing the original Clarence Clemons saxophone part with characteristically belligerent riffing by Morello can't stop it resembling something off Dire Straits' phoned-in final LP, *On Every Street*.

"Heaven's Wall", like *Wrecking Ball* cuts "Rocky Ground" and "Shackled & Drawn", seems to be a refugee from a never-completed gospel album that Springsteen had mooted. While there was never any doubt that audiences would respond obediently to the *"raise your hand, raise your hand"* refrain, Morello's shrieking wigout towards the end, while a necessary anti-soporific jolt by that point, also feels a wilfully incongruous accessory bolted on to make the song more than a blandly efficient rabble-rouser.

Nothing on *High Hopes* is bad, as such – Springsteen has always been insulated from hubris by his own essential modesty, and diligent command of his craft. But the middle stretch in particular is rather a trudge. "Down In The Hole", another slight outtake from *The Rising*, featuring backing vocals by Springsteen's three children, sounds half-thought, half-baked and half-finished, right down to Springsteen's abrupt and inexplicable shift from a distorted to a clean vocal halfway through the second line of the second verse, and the repeated heart/apart rhyme (rhyming "heart" and "apart" even once is rarely reassurance that a lyricist is staying up all night on the rewrites).

"Frankie Fell In Love", as the title suggests, was never intended as one of Springsteen's more profound meditations on masculinity – it's one of those generic but irresistibly big-hearted raveups that filled much of the running order of *Tracks* – but even this sounds like a failure of nerve. The first verse is sweet, and fragile, the promising beginnings of a cute, coy pop ballad, but Springsteen, apparently unconvinced of the song's ability to stand by itself, sounds the charge, and it gets trampled by the E Street Band at full gallop. "This Is Your Sword" is similarly over-burdened, Springsteen seeking an arrangement that encapsulates both the swagger of the E Street Band and the pastoral playfulness of The Seeger Sessions, but Cillian Vallely's uilleann pipes only end up emphasising a discomfiting resemblance to Big Country at their most blustery, or even Runrig.

The non-necessity of overselling these songs is illustrated further by the album's more restrained and delicate moments. "Hunter Of Invisible Game" is a husky lullaby, buoyed by a pretty string arrangement, and apparently anchored by an instruction to Morello to keep his foot off the wah-wah pedal for five minutes. "The Wall", which had first appeared in Springsteen's live setlist in 2003, is a solemn contemplation of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington DC – the stark slab of black gabbro bearing the names of 58,300 fallen soldiers, among them Bart Haynes, drummer with Springsteen's late-60s band The Castiles, who was killed at Quang Tri in 1967, and Jersey Shore rock pioneer Walter Cichon, who went missing near Kantom in 1968, and who Springsteen recalls in the sleevenotes ("He was the first person I ever stood in the presence of who was filled with the mystique of the true rock star.") In a lengthy preamble to the version of "The River" on the *Live 1975-85* box, Springsteen had addressed his conflicted feelings about his own response to being drafted, suggesting he deliberately failed the physical, and gently correcting the audience when they cheer ("It's nothing to applaud about"). On "The Wall", as he has done so effectively many times before, he tells the big story with a small one, reducing the incalculable loss to one simple, crushing reproach (*"I remember you in your Marine uniform/Laughin', laughin' at your ship-out party/I read Robert McNamara says he's sorry"*).

All that said, the least subtle moment of *High Hopes* is also its clear highlight. Springsteen had, of course, already recorded "The Ghost Of Tom Joad" as a mournful, mumbled letter of resignation by some ragged-trousered descendant of Steinbeck's itinerant Okie. Here, he duets it with Morello as a seven-and-a-half-minute manifesto of recriminatory rage, like something scribbled furiously in a backwoods bunker before being mailed to a local newspaper in a ticking parcel. Morello's soaring, screeching solos evoke distress signals from sinking ships, static from straining radios, Jimi Hendrix reclaiming "The Star Spangled Banner" in the act of destroying it. It's marvellous, and may there be much more where it came from: Springsteen would make a great angry old man. ✪

THE CRITICS' VERDICT...

★ **"If *High Hopes* is about anything, it's the failure of conventional belief systems and the blight of spiritual poverty experienced by all kinds and conditions of people as a result. Heavy, yes, But he's happy to carry it. And he carries it off."**
RICHARD WILLIAMS, UNCUT, JANUARY 2014

★ **"For most artists, a collection of previously unreleased offcuts would be released without much fanfare. But Bruce Springsteen is not most artists. Still the Boss."**
LEONIE COOPER, NME, JANUARY 11, 2014

Tom Morello's soaring, screeching solos evoke distress signals from sinking ships, static from straining radios

Commanding the crowd at the MusiCares Person Of The Year, LA Convention Center, , February 8, 2013

'WHEN YOU GET THE NOD, BLOW THE ROOF OFF'

On the road with a radical Boss! Direct from the heart of the E Street Band, most recent recruit TOM MORELLO reports on 2014 manoeuvres: from "Sun City" in South Africa to "Stayin' Alive" in Australia… "Bruce puts his hand on the band's shoulder and says, 'This is what we're going to do, and it's going to be great.' It's a self-fulfilling prophecy."

TAKEN FROM UNCUT MAY | 2014

INTERVIEW: MICHAEL BONNER. MARK DAVIS/WIREIMAGE, JEFF KRAVITZ/FILMMAGIC

I FIRST MET BRUCE in passing at a couple of Grammy parties over the years. I was not a casual Bruce Springsteen fan at the time. He was my favourite artist. I was very nervous and I think at one I said, "I'm the guitar player of Rage Against The Machine," and he said, "That's an exciting band." I said, "Thank you, thank you, Mr Springsteen…" But I was good friends with Bruce's sister, Pam. I knew her as a rock photographer, not even aware that she was related. I think the first time I met Bruce in that context was in '99 or 2000. What I think helped was that Rage Against The Machine covered "The Ghost Of Tom Joad" and we had to send our version off to him for approval because it was such a dramatic reworking of the song. We got word back that he liked it, so the next time I saw him we had that to talk about. He sounded surprised and pleased that a band like Rage Against The Machine knew his work – and it was work off an acoustic record, rather than something better known. So I'd see him at shows…

He'd sometimes come to my Nightwatchman shows. When it comes to the political overlap, we had a very interesting discussion on the last night of the Reunion Tour. He played 29 or whatever shows at Madison Square Garden – it was the last night of that. I think it was July 1, 2000. I had been on tour with Rage in Japan, flown home and just dropped my bags and flew to New York to go to the show. There was the big controversy over the song "American Skin (41 Shots)", about the fatal shooting of Amadou Diallo by the police, so there were these huge police protests at the show: pickets, boycotts and outrageous stories in the newspapers. But Bruce played the song at every one of the New York shows, and for the first time in the audience it wasn't people going "*Broooooce*": there were some real boos out there. But he meant what he said in the song. I said to him, "I have police protests at every one of my shows, I have built a career on songs that are protested by the police." We had a laugh about that, but for Bruce, whose audience is very broad, I thought that was very brave in light of the controversy to stick to his guns and fearlessly play that song every night.

It wasn't until 2008 that we first played together and that was a brand new version of "The Ghost Of Tom Joad" at Anaheim, California. He was working on the *Magic* album in Atlanta when I was coming through on a Nightwatchman tour. He came to see my show there. He was working with Brendan O'Brien, who was a longtime friend and work partner of mine. He said, "Tommy, you should come up and play with us some time." I was like, "That sounds good. I'm going to go to the internet to see when that might be." It turned out, in the not too distant future, they were playing in Anaheim, which is near my home in Los Angeles. So I called him up and said, "Hey, you remember when you said about me playing with you guys some time? How about Tuesday?" He liked that idea, and we talked briefly about what to play. I can't remember, but I think I suggested playing "…Tom Joad". He said, "Be ready to play acoustic or electric." I replied, "Do you want me to sing on it?" He said, "Of course I want you to sing on it." So I diligently went and practised. I'm always very excited and never nervous about performing – except for that! I had been practising with my rich, milk chocolate baritone voice the version off the acoustic record. When I arrived in Anaheim, I could hear the band doing an arrangement of the song. He had changed the key and moved it up about eight steps, so now it seemed to be well out of my range. Quickly figuring out transposing keys is not one of my strengths, so all of my good work had gone out of the window. I walked out onstage, nervous, I can't really say it right, I don't know how the voice is going to be in this new key and Little Steven is trying to talk me through it – "This is going to be so exciting" – and it's the worst night of my life. But they don't call him "the Boss" for nothing. Bruce puts his hand on my shoulder, looks me in the eye, and says, "We're going to play it in this key and it's going to be great." And sure enough, the tension dissolved, I had five or six shots of Jameson before I went on, and something happened in that room that was pretty special that night. Bruce was right: we played it in that key and it was fucking great!

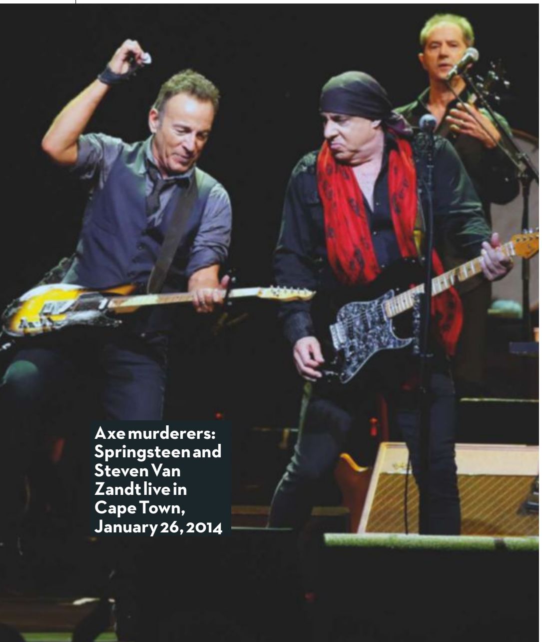
WE OPENED THE 2014 tour in South Africa, in Cape Town, with "Free Nelson Mandela". I don't know how well the audience knew the song. I think in some ways the cultural boycott of South Africa was perhaps too effective. But "Free Nelson Mandela", whether or not the audience was familiar with the original, the uplifting chorus of the song was immediately being sung, rafter to rafter. The next day, Pete Seeger died, such a gentle soul and such a great peaceful warrior for a better world. Bruce's immediate response when he heard the news was, "We're going to do something tonight." Then it was a matter of getting down to work: let's be great for Pete. We did "We Shall Overcome" and "This Little Light Of Mine". "We Shall Overcome"… it was hard not to bawl like a baby during that. The next night we played Little Steven's song, "Sun City", with Mos Def.

We've been opening shows with a new song pretty much every night and sometimes there's no soundcheck. So there's a nine-minute rehearsal with an 18-piece band of a song we've never played before, and then we open a show in front of 25,000 people with it. This is what Bruce does. He puts his hand on the band's shoulder and says, "This is what we're going to do, and it's going to be great." It's a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When I was asked to replace Little Steven on the 2012 tour, when he was shooting his TV show, *Lilyhammer*, I'd played with the E Street Band maybe 15, 20 times. Whenever we were in the same city,

BOSSFACTS

High Hopes Tour: The Stats
(Jan 26–March 2)
Shows played: 17
Total no. of tickets sold: 341,314
Box office gross: $44.2m
Total number of songs played: 129
Biggest attendance: Mount Smart Stadium, New Zealand, 73,958
Guests: Eddie Vedder, Mos Def, Jon Landau, Cooper + Koo string section
Longest show: 3 hr 43 min (Brisbane Entertainment Centre)
Albums played in full: *Born In The USA* (x2), *Born To Run* (x2), *Darkness On The Edge Of Town*, *The Wild, The Innocent…*


Axe murderers: Springsteen and Steven Van Zandt live in Cape Town, January 26, 2014

© MIKE HUTCHINGS/REUTERS/CORBIS

"To stand shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart..." Morello and Springsteen backstage at the 25th Anniversary Rock'n'Roll Hall Of Fame Concert at New York's Madison Square Garden, October 29, 2009

we'd play. It went from me playing on "Tom Joad", which was the first song I ever played with them, to maybe playing on five or six songs. But when we went to Australia on that tour, in my entire career as a musician, from my first garage band through my college bands to Rage Against The Machine, Audioslave, the Nightwatchman, I never performed as many songs as I did on that tour. I think in 10 shows we played 78 songs, which is conservative because on the tour that I'm on right now, in 15 shows we've played 126 songs, which is a world record. And we've got two more to go before this thing is done. So we may hit 200.

How do we decide what to play? Two examples. When we did "Stayin' Alive" [*Brisbane, February 26, 2014*], Bruce, Steve and I were sitting around the hotel and Bruce says, "I've got the opening song for tomorrow night. 'Stayin' Alive'." The looks on my face and Steve's were polar opposites. I was like, 'That's fantastic.' Steve was like, "…what?" Then we work it up. Bruce conducts the band through an arrangement that he had in rehearsal that day and we open the show with it. In Perth, I went to Bon Scott's grave the night before the show and we were sitting in the hotel bar after and I said to Bruce, "Do you think there is an overlapping territory between the E Street Band and AC/DC?" Without hesitating he said, "I'm sure there is." So we talked about a couple of songs and the next thing you know, we're opening the show with "Highway To Hell". We've also had the good fortune to overlap a couple of times with Eddie Vedder, who joined us onstage in Melbourne and Brisbane, which has been spectacular.

> "No-one sang more passionately and angrily about the injustices of apartheid" TOM MORELLO

The band is amazing. It's like a guitar army onstage right now. Nils is spectacular, not just a great, great soloist, but probably the most multi-faceted guitar player I've ever known. I often turn to him and say, "What key is this one in?", as Bruce fires off unknown song after unknown song. He's a great resource in that regard. Steve is the vibe guy. He's the Keith Richards of the E Street Band. Bruce has been playing particularly great lead guitar on this tour. Last night, on "Incident On 57th Street", he played one of the best solos I've ever heard him play. He's playing a song and performing. As a rhythm guitar player, I view my role very clearly: play the songs. Someone is going to be playing a straight-up A minor barre chord here, Nils is going to be doing some version of it, Little Steven's going to be mugging, Bruce is going to be swinging from the rafters, so I'm like: play the chord.

Am I a fully fledged member of the E Street Band? The way I look at it is, I'm an ally and comrade in arms. The E Street Band is an institution. People have been in the E Street Band for four decades. I'm beyond thrilled to have an E Street Band stamp in my passport and that they are great friends and musical compadres. The E Street Band is Bruce, Patti, Nils, Garry, Max, Roy, Steve, Clarence and Danny. Sometimes I just take a moment during the show where I act as an audience member and I turn and watch Bruce Springsteen sing "Born To Run" and just enjoy the fact that, somehow, I've parachuted onto the stage and I'm in the midst of the E Street Band, one of my favourite bands of all time.

My involvement with them has been a very, very, very gradual process. In 2008, I played one song. Then every once in a while I'd play one song or two songs. Then it's four songs. Then last year in Australia I played the whole set and on this tour I'm playing the whole set with four guitar players. Everyone's been so gracious and helpful. It's been the most drama-free, easy-going and professional situation I've ever been around. But you have to be ready, because if Steven played the solo in the song last night you might be playing it tonight when you get the nod from Bruce. The way I look at it, the E Street Band has been a great live band for 40 years. So rule No 1: don't fuck it up. They don't need me to be great, they are already great. So play the songs, don't fuck it up and when CONTINUES OVER »

KEVIN MAZUR/WIREIMAGE

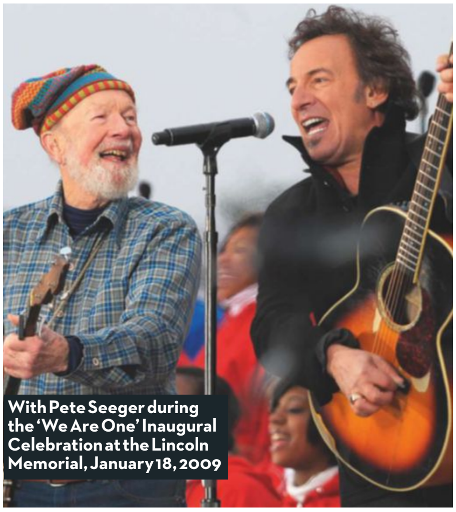
Bruce gives you the nod, blow the roof off the place. Very simple.

IN 1988, I saw Bruce play on a cable TV special of an Amnesty International concert from Buenos Aires. Up until then, I was a fan of metal music and punk and early hip-hop, and I only really knew Bruce's music through the "Dancing In The Dark" and "Glory Days" videos. But seeing that concert, the emotional depth of it and the thrilling heights of it propelled me immediately into buying *Darkness On The Edge Of Town* on cassette. It soon became one of my all-time favourite records. It spoke to the existential angst of my Midwestern upbringing. *Nebraska* was the next record I got. I got those two in quick succession. I've always been a fan of heavy music, but *Nebraska*, even though it's done just with acoustic guitar and harmonica on a four-track recorder, was as heavy as anything in the Metallica catalogue. It was the politics, with a lowercase 'p', the narrative sketches that were drawn in those songs that resonated with me. They felt like they were chapters in my own life. What he captures in songs like "Nebraska" and "Racing In The Street" is that desperation and hopelessness tinged with hope. Other voices like Chuck D or Joe Strummer had spoken to my internal political fire, and I identified with their lyrics. But those stories in those songs – I was surprised to hear Bruce was from New Jersey and not from Libertyville, Illinois where I grew up.

At that time, I was in full political activist mode and one very important moment was seeing Bruce in Little Steven's "Sun City" video. The anti-apartheid movement was very near to my heart. I was one of the students at Harvard University who was propelling the anti-apartheid movement on campus there and we built shantytowns in Harvard Yard, and one of the soundtracks to our protest was "Sun City". This is probably before I was a fan of Bruce's music, but no-one sang more passionately and angrily about the injustices of apartheid. Even though he's got just a couple of lines in that song, it was impressive. It stood in sharp juxtaposition to my misunderstanding of what Bruce was about – the happy guy in the video for "Dancing In The Dark".

But even in "Dancing In The Dark" and "Glory Days", those are very dark lyrics dressed up in these perfect pop songs – which is one of the reasons why Bruce's music resonates with so many people, the casual fans and fans of lyrics and fans of handsome lead singers and fans of leftist music. He very authentically speaks to all those different guys. At the time, Joe Strummer and Chuck D were my guys, and the character in those videos was very different. I just didn't understand it until I saw that live concert from Buenos Aires. For many people the transformative experience is seeing Bruce live, and although I didn't see him live in a room until years later, you could see the commitment and the passion in the Amnesty International show. I remember watching it in my living room. He played "The River" and it brought tears to my eyes, this TV concert, and then the stadium exploded at the end, it was hit after hit and the place was going wild and I thought, 'Man, maybe I should check this guy out.'

I worked my way through the back catalogue slowly because I was on a bit of a budget, so I lived with those two records [*Darkness On The Edge Of Town* and *Nebraska*] for a long time. Then there was *Born In The USA*, which I hadn't paid close enough attention to, but clearly was an indictment of Reagan-era America. Taking it backwards, it wasn't until probably some years later, when I started to become a fan of the first three records, that I started immersing myself in the deep catalogue. When I'd go on tour I'd find bootlegs of the unreleased songs from *The River*, this huge catalogue of unreleased material that was available from bootleggers. There are some real gems in that. That's how the progression went. I first saw Bruce in '92, when he was playing with "The Other Band", not the E Street Band. That was a good show, but it wasn't a show that matched the skyrocket heights of my memory of the Amnesty tour I saw on TV.


With Pete Seeger during the 'We Are One' Inaugural Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial, January 18, 2009

But the next time I saw him was on the *Ghost Of Tom Joad* tour. That album and that show were a big deal to me. I couldn't believe how one guy with a guitar could for two hours put on a show that was so riveting. It was heavier than any metal show I'd been to: it was deep, it was dark. The things I looked for in my Sabbath world were eclipsed by this six-string guitar and this guy repurposing his back catalogue in an acoustic context. "...Tom Joad" and "Youngstown" resonated with me and harmonised with my political worldview. "...Tom Joad" speaks to the ever-present spark of rebellion in the human spirit and how it's passed from generation to generation, and sometimes it's the lonely deeds of resistance that are the way you move the chains of progress forward. Tom Joad's the main character in John Steinbeck's novel and the film, *The Grapes Of Wrath*. He's an Oklahoma sharecropper who develops a political awakening and goes on at the end of the book to leave his family. He has this conversation with his mother, which Bruce paraphrases at the end of song, where she's afraid she'll never see him again and he says something like, "Wherever people are fighting for their rights, wherever babies are hungry and someone is trying to fight to see that they have a more just world to live in, that's where I'll be." That sentiment in the book, in the film and in the song is at the core of my political beliefs: in your place, in your time, you stand up for what is right, and you swing with all your might and you may not be remembered for it or you may in congress with your fellow men and women change the world. Bruce Springsteen's "Ghost Of Tom Joad" is both a sad lament and a subtle threat and it really spoke to me.

"Youngstown" is the song that literally began my career as a political folk troubadour, the Nightwatchman. It was the first song I learned to strum and sing on a guitar. Some years later I began writing my own songs, but that was the first time I ever sat with an acoustic guitar and sang a song. Instead of writing a riff or singing along with the radio, it was like, "Ah!" It felt good. It was a bit of a mental hurdle to get over.

Is Bruce a comparable figure to Woody Guthrie or Pete Seeger? I look at it slightly different from that. I don't think you can ghetto-ise protest music or social justice music. I think that, yes, Bruce is another link in the chain of Joe Hill, Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger. But so too are The Clash and Public Enemy and System Of A Down and Rage Against The Machine. I don't think it's genre-specific. It's artists who are compelled by their worldview to make use of their vocation, in subtle ways or grand ways, to make a just planet. Certainly, *Nebraska* and *The Ghost Of Tom Joad* share something specific with Guthrie's *Dust Bowl Ballads*, but early Dylan must be mentioned in the same breath. The first Rage Against The Machine record was written right before the Rodney King verdict and the LA riots, and it's like that one has Marshall stacks. To me, that's the only difference. *It Takes A Nation Of Millions...* was written at a political and racial juncture in American history that captures the zeitgeist in the way that Guthrie did, in the same way Bruce did with *Nebraska*. Bruce and I have never had a discussion about where his personal sense of protest comes from; I've told him about my political beginnings but I've not heard from him that way. There is this understanding that we're all on the same side of the fence, that there's work to be done, as opposed to just passing through the political landscape. I won't speak for him, but his experiences and the evident tensions of class and race where he grew up are echoed through his body of work. He's a writer as well. He uses to great effect his imagination to project himself as a lyricist into situations beyond his own experience. In my own writing, I only write one character: me. I have a bottomless well of demons to exorcise!

We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions is one of my favourite Bruce Springsteen records, for several reasons. The lyrical content of those songs that were popularised by Pete Seeger I think very much speaks to now. A song like "Mrs McGrath", coming out during the Iraq and Afghanistan quagmire, I'm not sure what century it was written in, but it speaks to both American and Iraqi mothers and their fears of their child coming home disfigured by a brutal

MANDEL NGAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The E Street Band on *Late Night With Jimmy Fallon*, March 2, 2012

and immoral war. When Bruce played those songs on that tour it became this great hootenanny, a huge party, and that's part of the genius of his work. He can take these songs with deep and serious content and have everyone dancing on the table. I get to see that every night, which is pretty crazy.

WHILE WE WERE in Australia, in 2012, we made a record. Before we left for Australia, I was driving home one night listening to E Street Radio, which is a satellite radio station that just plays Bruce Springsteen songs, and "High Hopes" came on. It felt like a hidden B-side gem from the '90s or whenever. I thought if the horn line could be doubled with rock guitars, it could be a really exciting rock song, so I texted Bruce and said, "Hey, what do you think about doing this on the coming tour?" So we worked that one up, and it sounded fantastic. Also before we'd left, Bruce was recording "American Skin (41 Shots)" and sent that to me to play guitar on. He seemed to like it, sent me a couple more songs. It was never stated it was a record. He's always recording music. Then more songs kept coming, and I'd play guitar on them and send them back. When we were in Australia, one morning I got a text saying, "Be ready to go to the studio at 10.30, what gear do you need?" So I get in the car and get driven to a studio that's two hours away from Brisbane, and [*engineer*] Nick DiDia is there and I'm like, "What are we doing, man?" That was the day that I played the solo for "…Tom Joad", did some vocals on "American Skin", played on "Hunter Of Invisible Game" and then the whole band, when we were in Sydney, recorded "High Hopes" and "Just Like Fire Would", which we'd also been playing on tour. But still it wasn't discussed that this was an album: we were just recording songs. But I think Bruce amassed a small catalogue of songs that seemed to fit very well together and it was pretty clear that it was becoming a record. On the plane ride back the last time, he was actually sequencing. I know what that word means! That means something may be coming out…

Where do I think *High Hopes* fits in with Bruce's protest songs? I think the title track in some ways speaks for itself. But from the dark existential journey of "Hunter Of Invisible Game" to the ferocious "…Tom Joad" to the Marshall stack hymn of "American Skin", I think it's both a subtle and blunt picture of the current state of affairs that we're in. There is intrinsically in Bruce's music, if you had to find one word to distill a career, "hope". But the reason why one has to have hope is because shit's pretty fucked up. Once everything is OK, hope is something of the past. But it's the angry studio version of "Ghost Of Tom Joad" that I'm very proud of. It was a challenge to capture the live fire and the goose-bump moment that song delivers live – but we did. "Down In The Hole" is as depressing a song as Bruce has written – and he's written some fantastically depressing songs. When a song makes me feel bad, it's good. And that's a deep hole.

> "He takes these deep, serious songs and has everyone dancing on the tables" TOM MORELLO

Bruce has a tremendous amount of stored-up goodwill. For years, he was involved in Amnesty International. There's the opportunity for people to contribute to local food banks and charities. That Robin Hood scene happens at every show. The first time Bruce got involved with electoral politics was the John Kerry campaign [*in 2004*], and when someone with the gravitas of Springsteen for the first time enters that world, although it didn't win Kerry the election, it was certainly meaningful. It showed a shift, that he was willing to put himself out there behind a candidate for president, which he'd never done before.

Does music make a difference? It made a difference to me. Not a day goes by when I don't hear from and see in the street, or in hotel lobbies, or at the beach, someone who comes up and tells me how Rage or the Nightwatchman has changed their life, and opened doors for them or encouraged them to pursue knowledge or pursue activism or try to get their hands on the wheel of history. Certainly Bruce has done that. Throughout his catalogue, when the right combination of lyric and rhythm and rock occurs, it speaks a kind of truth that is deep in the human DNA, in a way that is different from film or literature. There's something in humans, in the reptilian part of the brain, when you hear that beat and there's something about a rhyming couplet that rings true… and the truth you feel in Bruce Springsteen is a combination of empathy with people experiencing the worst of times and a parting of the clouds and the ability to hope and dream and fight for something better. ✪

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Sign of the times: The Boss meets his fans, 1979

LYNN GOLDSMITH/CORBIS

SPRINGSTEEN MISCELLANY

BORN TO COMP!

A FULL TRACKLISTING OF SPRINGSTEEN ANTHOLOGIES

GREATEST HITS

RELEASED FEBRUARY 28, 1995
UK: 1 US: 1
Tracklisting: Born To Run/Thunder Road/Badlands/The River/Hungry Heart/Atlantic City/Dancing In The Dark/Born In The USA/My Hometown/Glory Days/Brilliant Disguise/Human Touch/Better Days/Streets Of Philadelphia/Secret Garden/Murder Incorporated* (recorded '82)/Blood Brothers* ('95)/This Hard Land* ('95)
**Previously unavailable*

TRACKS/ 18 TRACKS

RELEASED NOV 10, 1998/APRIL 13, 1999
UK: 50/23 US: 27/64
For full details of tracklisting see pages 84-87

THE ESSENTIAL BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

RELEASED NOVEMBER 11, 2003
UK: 28 US: 14
The three-disc limited edition contained significant previously unreleased material, as well as rare b-sides and demos.
Disc 1: Blinded By The Light/For You/Spirit In The Night/4th Of July, Asbury Park (Sandy)/Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)/Thunder Road/Born To Run/Jungleland/Badlands/Darkness On The Edge Of Town/Promised Land/The River/Hungry Heart/Nebraska/Atlantic City
Disc 2: Born In The USA/Glory Days/Dancing In The Dark/Tunnel Of Love/Brilliant Disguise/Human Touch/Living Proof/Lucky Town/Streets Of Philadelphia/The Ghost Of Tom Joad/The Rising/Mary's Place/Lonesome Day/American Skin (41 Shots) (Live At Madison Square Garden)/Land Of Hope And Dreams (Live At Madison Square Garden)
Disc 3 (Limited edition): From Small Things (Big Things One Day Come) (recorded 1979)/The Big Payback (home recording shortly after *Nebraska* sessions)/Held Up Without A Gun (live December 31, 1980 at Nassau Coliseum)/Trapped (live August 6, 1984 at Meadowlands Arena)/None But The Brave/(recorded during *Born In The USA* sessions)/Missing (appeared in Sean Penn film *The Crossing Guard*)/Lift Me Up (written for the John Sayles film *Limbo*)/Viva Las Vegas (recorded for NME benefit album)/County Fair (recorded in 1983 in California after *Nebraska* sessions)/Code Of Silence (recorded live June 29, 2000 at Madison Square Garden)/Dead Man Walkin' (from the film)/Countin' On A Miracle (acoustic)

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN & THE E STREET BAND GREATEST HITS

RELEASED JUNE 1, 2009 (EUROPE); JAN 13, 2009 (US)
UK: 3 US: 43
With its focus firmly on live favourites, this looked to capitalise on Springsteen's memorable Glastonbury set. Interestingly, a different 12-track version was made available in the US, exclusively via retailer Wal-Mart.
European tracklisting: Blinded By The Light/ Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)/Born To Run/Thunder Road/Badlands/Darkness On The Edge Of Town/Hungry Heart/The River /Born In The USA/I'm On Fire/Glory Days/Dancing In The Dark/The Rising/Lonesome Day/Radio Nowhere/Long Walk Home/Because The Night/Fire

COLLECTION 1973 TO 2012

RELEASED APRIL 15, 2013 (EUROPE)
UK: - US: -
Tracklisting: Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)/Thunder Road/Born To Run/Badlands/The Promised Land/Hungry Heart/Atlantic City/Born In The USA/Dancing In The Dark/Brilliant Disguise/Human Touch/Streets Of Philadelphia/The Ghost Of Tom Joad/The Rising/Radio Nowhere/Working On A Dream/We Take Care Of Our Own/Wrecking Ball

THE ALBUM COLLECTION VOL 1: 1973-1984

RELEASED NOVEMBER 17, 2014
UK: 128 US: 82
Contains: Greetings From Asbury Park, NJ/The Wild, The Innocent And The E Street Shuffle/Born To Run/Darkness On The Edge Of Town/The River/Nebraska/Born In The USA

CONTINUES OVER »

"IT'S ALL FOR A GOOD CAUSE…"

BESPOKE CONTRIBUTIONS TO TRIBUTE ALBUMS, CHARITY RECORDS AND MORE

NO NUKES, THE MUSE CONCERTS FOR A NON-NUCLEAR FUTURE
MUSICIANS UNITED FOR SAFE ENERGY
ASYLUM, 1979
Bruce and the E Streeters played the No Nukes concert in September 1979, with "Stay" and "The Detroit Medley" included on the subsequent live album. These were the earliest official live recordings of Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band ever released.

IN HARMONY 2
COLUMBIA, 1981
This compilation of songs for children featured the first appearance of one of Springsteen most successful-ever singles: "Santa Claus Is Comin' To Town" – a Top 10 hit when packaged with "My Hometown" in 1985.

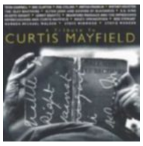
WE ARE THE WORLD
UNITED SUPPORT OF ARTISTS FOR AFRICA
COLUMBIA, 1985
He sang on the Michael Jackson/Lionel Richie-penned charity single, but Bruce and the E Street band also contributed Jimmy Cliff cover "Trapped" to the album – a track that has often made its way.

A VERY SPECIAL CHRISTMAS
A&M, 1987
The b-side to 1986 single "War", Springsteen's version of Lou Baxter and Johnny Moore's "Merry Christmas Baby" turned up here, alongside performances from Sting, Whitney Houston and Run DMC.

FOLKWAYS, A VISION SHARED – A TRIBUTE TO WOODY GUTHRIE & LEADBELLY
CBS, 1988
This paean to two of American music's enduring icons featured two Woody Guthrie covers from Bruce: "I Ain't Got No Home" and "Vigilante Man".

HARRY CHAPIN TRIBUTE
RELATIVITY, 1990
A live recording of the concert for late singer-songwriter Harry Chapin. Alongside cuts from Pete Seeger, Graham Nash and Pat Benatar, there's Springsteen's seven-minute version of "Remember When The Music".

FOR OUR CHILDREN
VARIOUS ARTISTS
KID RHINO, 1991
Springsteen's take on hoary Boy Scout singalong "Chicken Lips And Lizard Hips" lined up alongside Paul McCartney and Elton John and more on this set of kid-friendly tunes.



A TRIBUTE TO CURTIS MAYFIELD
VARIOUS ARTISTS
WARNER BROS, 1994
Another tribute, another list of big names (Eric Clapton, BB King, Rod Stewart) and another cover, "Gypsy Woman".

THE CONCERT FOR THE ROCK AND ROLL HALL OF FAME
SONY, 1996
This benefit gig for the museum saw Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band joined by Jerry Lee Lewis to take on The Killer's classics "Shake, Rattle And Roll", "Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On" and "Great Balls Of Fire".

'TIL WE OUTNUMBER 'EM
RIGHTEOUS BABE, 2000
A second tribute to Springsteen's hero Woody Guthrie, this time instigated by Ani DiFranco. Bruce performs "Riding My Car" and "Deportee (Plane Wreck At Los Gatos)".

AMERICA: A TRIBUTE TO HEROES
INTERSCOPE, 2001
A concert organised by George Clooney as a fundraiser for victims of 9/11. Springsteen's contribution is a slightly modified version of The Rising's "My City Of Ruins".

KINDRED SPIRITS: A TRIBUTE TO THE SONGS OF JOHNNY CASH
SONY MUSIC, 2002
Bob Dylan submitted a serviceable "Train Of Love", and Springsteen recorded "Give My Love To Rose" especially for this salute to the Man In Black on his 70th birthday.

ENJOY EVERY SANDWICH: THE SONGS OF WARREN ZEVON
ARTEMIS, 2004
Bob Dylan, Adam Sandler, the Pixies and Van Dyke Parks were Springsteen's suitably eclectic colleagues in this tribute; the Boss contribution being a live version of "My Ride Is Here".

WE ALL LOVE ENNIO MORRICONE
SONY MUSIC, 2007
Springsteen lent his version of "Once Upon A Time In The West" to this celebration of the work of the vaunted Italian soundtrack composer. Fellow contributors include Andrea Bocelli, Quincy Jones, Roger Waters and Metallica…

SOWING THE SEEDS – THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY
APPLESEED, 2007
10th anniversary do for respected American folk label Appleseed featuring an impressive guestlist, including Joan Baez and Pete Seeger, who duetted with the Boss on a version of "The Ghost Of Tom Joad".

HOPE FOR HAITI NOW
MTV NETWORKS, 2010
Another fundraiser, with Bruce Springsteen contributing "We Shall Overcome" to benefit victims of 2010's earthquake.

LOOKING INTO YOU: A TRIBUTE TO JACKSON BROWNE
MUSIC ROAD, 2014
"Linda Paloma" with Patti Scialfa.

BUYING UP THE BOSS

THE MARKET FOR SPRINGSTEEN COLLECTABLES

FOR OWNERS OF an immaculate Springsteen record collection, we have some potentially disappointing news. Standard issues of his LPs are worth less than a pub lunch, and even his very rarest UK singles – 1978's "Promised Land", say – change hands for tens, rather than hundreds of pounds. For serious Boss collectors, the devil is in the detail, according to Mark Evetts, buyer for memorabilia specialist 991.com. "Springsteen's catalogue has never really been out of print, so collectors' favourites are those items made in minute quantities, rare promos or foreign pressings."

But compared to his megastar contemporaries, Springsteen promos are remarkably strait-laced – you won't find stars-and-stripes condoms or *Born To Run* souvenir jogging pants on any dealer list. "I suspect his label did their research, and understood the relatively conservative demographics of his fanbase," suggests Evetts.

Springsteen promo material does tend to be functional rather than frivolous – while a rare satin-black bomber jacket from the '80/'81 *River* tour will set you back over $400, by far the most expensive item on 991's books is a Japanese promo CD from 1988, *70's to 80's The Future Of Rock'N'Roll*. This legendary rarity – "probably the hardest Springsteen promo to find" – contains no surprises in its 30-track running order, but is worth well over $1600.

Also from Japan is the super-desirable early "Hungry Heart" 7" single, whose picture sleeve was allegedly withdrawn at Springsteen's personal request. That'll set you back over $200. Meanwhile, the US 7" one-track promo for "Santa Claus…" – with its custom cartoon sleeve – has a pricetag of over $100. And as if to prove that odder is better when it comes to Bruce, a reel-to-reel issue of *Nebraska* has recently sold online for nearly $300.

Some other sought-after items are related to Springsteen's well-documented charitable work. So, for example, the impossibly rare boxset of 12 Springsteen CD albums produced for the 1993 Concert For The Kristen Ann Carr Fund at at Madison Square Garden costs collectors up to $1000, while a set of mint promotional posters for 1979's No Nukes benefit gigs can fetch over $200.

Other Boss memorabilia – concert programmes, ticket stubs, even autographed albums – can still be bought relatively cheaply, but does Evetts sense things changing? "I'd have no hesitation buying in more Springsteen merchandise," he concludes. "His stock as an artist is higher now than it has been for 20 years. There is a huge market out there." So that "I'm On Fire" picture disc might be worth holding onto…

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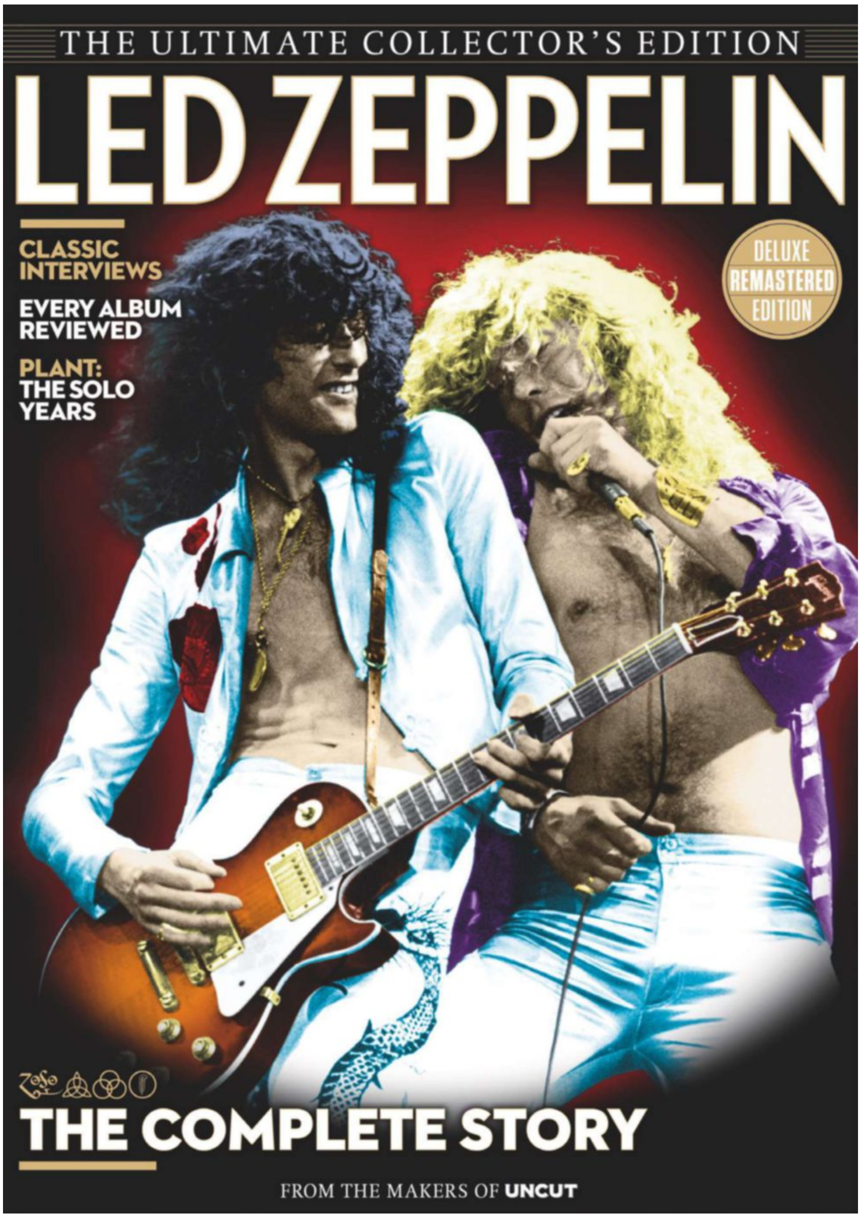

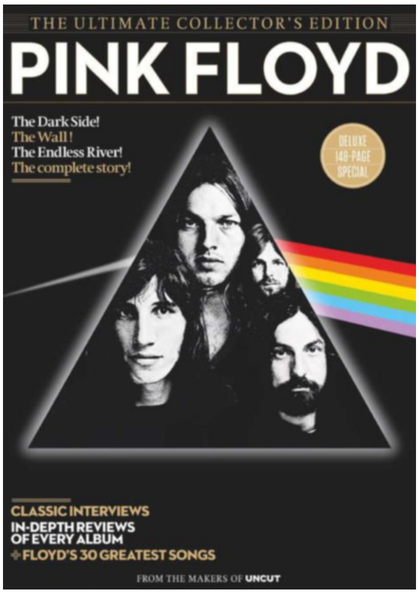

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FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

Stop me... if you've heard this one before

LA 1975: *Uncut*'s Roy Carr introduces Bruce to his old friend – Phil Spector

THE FIRST THING I notice, getting on the 747 for the flight from London to Los Angeles, is that I seem to know everybody on it. Looking down the aisle, everyone's a familiar face. It's like walking into a music business watering hole – The Speakeasy, perhaps, or The Marquee. There's a lot of aviator shades and satin tour jackets, the vague uniform of the record business in the mid-'70s, when there was still enough money to fund junkets like this corporate beano, bankrolled by CBS, to promote their new megastar-in-waiting, Bruce Springsteen.

By now, CBS have invested so much time and money in Springsteen's new LP – *Born To Run* – that any criticism of Bruce is tantamount to heresy. As it happens, I've just reviewed *Born To Run* for the *NME*, and openly questioned the overkill surrounding Springsteen. Which is why, when they see me walking down the aisle, the CBS reps are gripped by panic, gums turning white. They want to know what I'm doing, what business I might have in LA. What they don't know, and it amuses me not to tell them, is that I'm on my way to interview Phil Spector. I'm also due to discuss further with Phil the screenplay he wants me to write for a film based on his life which is to star Al Pacino.

What I tell the fretting CBS execs, however, is that I'm here to shadow their junket and write a piece for *NME* describing the lengths they are going to in their determination to make Springsteen a star – namely, flying at huge expense a vast contingent of the UK's music press to LA to see Bruce at The Roxy, where they will be expected to prostrate themselves at the altar of his genius. They turn apoplectic at this, and amid much red-faced blustering tell me I can expect no access to Springsteen, who they will make sure I don't get close to. They will even make sure I don't get tickets for The Roxy.

In LA, the sweltering UK hacks are herded on a bus and driven across town to their hotel. I've been booked into the rather more swish Sunset Marquis. I check in, get my bearings. One of my immediate neighbours is Steve Marriott. A couple of Elton John's roadies are next door. Directly across the hall is, *er*, Bruce Springsteen.

I'm no stranger to Spector's bizarre nocturnal lifestyle, so for the next couple of days I hang around the hotel pool, chatting and drinking with Miami Steve Van Zandt and actor Tony Roberts, a Woody Allen regular.

One afternoon, the California sun high in the sky, a figure steps out of the shade of the reception area, grinning and bearded. He walks up to us. "Hi," he says, hand outstretched. "I'm Bruce Springsteen. Who are you? Everyone

> "Hi, I'm Bruce. Who are you? Everyone from the record company's trying to keep me away from you. What are you? A hitman?"

from the record company's trying hard to keep me away from you. What are you? A hitman?"

I tell him the backstory. Bruce laughs.

"The CBS guys will be here any moment. Let's make 'em real nervous," he grins.

When the gobsmacked record company people arrive, Bruce and I have our arms around each other, mugging for the cameras, having our picture taken together [*above*].

"Have you met my very good friend from England?" Bruce asks them. "Have you got tickets for tonight?" he asks me. I haven't. "Make sure he gets a ticket," he tells them. "If he isn't there, I might not show!"

That night, I share a table at The Roxy with Carole King and Joni Mitchell, who disappears after four numbers. It's a good show, and afterwards I ask Springsteen if he'd like to come with me the following evening to meet Spector at Gold Star Studios, where he's producing a track for Dion. Around 20 of LA's finest session musicians are crammed into one studio and the atmosphere's typically charged as Spector, diminutive, dressed in flowing green surgeon's gown and tinted shades, barks orders from the darkened control booth.

"Guitars," he yells at Dan and David Kessel (sons of venerated jazz guitarist, Barney), "go for the kill! Jim Keltner, who do you think you are? C'mon, give me more drums. Estes… Estes," he shouts at first-call percussionist Gene Estes, "give me all you've got… Great. He's just taken his cock out!"

I haven't frisked Phil personally, but he doesn't appear to be armed tonight – a change from when, a few nights later, I take The Ramones up to Spector's fortified mansion and he pulls a gun on Dee Dee.

Springsteen watches rapt as Spector meticulously builds up the track – a version of "Let's Stick Together" – layer by layer. "Doesn't this make 'Born To Run' suck?" Spector jokes, throwing an arm around Bruce in a public display of genuine affection.

Not much later, out by the drinks machine, I'm having an argument with Robert Hilburn of the *LA Times*. My point is that CBS are in danger of hyping Springsteen out of existence. The argument gets pretty heated and when I look around, I notice Spector and Springsteen have been listening to us. "That's what I like, a good fight," Spector chortles. "When can we expect some blood to flow?"

Later, when things cool down, Springsteen takes me aside. "You don't really know me," he says, "but you were defending me on moral grounds and I appreciate that."

The following day, again much to the distress of his CBS minders, Springsteen insists I accompany him and the entire E Street Band on a trip to Disneyland. I don't need asking twice. Once we get there, these hard-bitten young rockers entirely regress, raiding the souvenir shops and swarming over every ride. The crowning moment, however, is when Miami Steve approaches a wide-eyed attendant and asks where he can find Porno Land.

"Pardon me, sir?" replies the startled attendant. "Where is Porno Land?" Steve asks again, gesticulating like Silvio Dante, the mobster he later plays in *The Sopranos*. "I hear they're showing the movie, 'Goofy Throat'," Van Zandt goes on. "I wanna see that. After which, we all want to visit Minnie Mouse's Massage Parlour. So, where is it?"

This is too much for the CBS man, who collapses on a nearby bench, me and Miami Steve looking at him, grinning, Miami Steve wearing Mickey Mouse ears, the man from CBS going ashen-faced, cradling his head in his hands, defeated.

Score: one-nil to the visitors. ✪

FROM THE MAKERS OF

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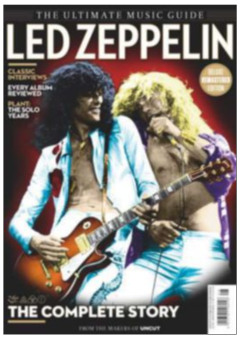

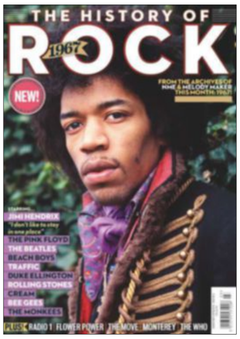

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